

PROFILES IN RESILIENCE:  
NARRATIVES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL CAPITAL  
IN THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF BLACK SEXUAL MINORITY MEN  
DURING SECONDARY SCHOOL

by  
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A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Baltimore, Maryland  
October, 2015

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the role that gatekeeper narratives about homosexuality play in controlling Black sexual minority men's access to academically related social capital in schools, families and churches during secondary school. Gatekeeper narratives are theoretically framed within master narratives and public narratives (Somers 1994) using a social ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Master narratives are identified through previous literature on sexual and race that have taken a historical perspective. Public narratives are identified both through previous literature and through a content analysis of sermons, political speeches, voting records, and social media commentary. Forty, Black sexual minority men were interviewed about their experiences and interactions with gatekeepers (teachers, classmates, parents, religious leaders) in microsystems (schools, families and churches).

Master narratives of the heterosexual-homosexual binary and sexualized racism intersect to shape the experiences of Black sexual minority men and to frame narratives about homosexuality within Black communities. A diverse set of narratives exist within Black communities and are employed by gatekeepers, but two narratives emerged in interviews as the most widespread and most likely to remove men's access to social capital across microsystems: the "Real Man" narrative and Biblical inerrancy. The "Real Man" narrative rests on a cultural value of hegemonic masculinity, while Biblical inerrancy often upholds a form of Christianity that marginalizes sexual minority people.

Study men lost access to social capital primarily through indirect means. Relationships weakened when gatekeepers drew upon negative narratives, such as the

“Real Man” narrative and Biblical inerrancy, and reacted poorly to learning that the study man was not heterosexual. This rejection caused many study men to experience situational depression, which diminished their ability to focus on academic work. Often relationships with gatekeepers improved over time. Even though many men lost access to social capital, all men were successful in school. This success might be attributed to the intervention of other gatekeepers who affirmed the sexuality of study men at critical points and to the resilience of the study men.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Institute for Educational Studies, which provided funding for my graduate studies through a pre-doctoral fellowship program. I would like to thank my dissertation committee, including Dr. Ronald Walters, Dr. Terri Williams and Dr. Aaron Goodfellow, for their helpful comments and critiques as I worked through the proposal phase of the dissertation. I would especially like to thank my graduate advisor, Dr. Katrina Bell McDonald, for organizing the dissertation committee, for guiding me through the dissertation project from initial topic ideas to completed document, and for her assurance throughout the challenges of the dissertation writing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Karl Alexander, the second reader on the dissertation committee, for his thorough comments and edits on multiple drafts of each dissertation chapter and for his suggestion to restructure several chapters for clarity. I would like to thank my parents, Scott and Becky, my sister, Mary Beth, and Chosei for their encouragement and emotional support during the course of the dissertation project.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In this dissertation, I hope to illuminate the experiences of Black sexual minority men as they transition to adulthood. Specifically, I investigate the role that narratives about homosexuality play in controlling men's access to social capital in various, developmental settings. I focus on forms of social capital that aid the academic success of high school students for two reasons. First, academic success in high school is related to a number of young adult and later life outcomes, including economic security (Haveman & Wolfe 1984), physical health (Cutler & Lleras-Muney 2006; Lleras-Muney 2005), mental health (Castriota 2006; Oreopoulos 2007), and political involvement (Milligan, Morretti & Oreopoulos 2004). Second, the vast majority of literature on Black sexual minority men has focused on the growing HIV epidemic. While this scholarship is critical, it is also important to investigate other aspects of these men's lives.

I focus on Black sexual minority men because many studies on sexual minority youth have included primarily non-Hispanic White samples. While these studies have been illuminating, it is important to understand the unique experiences of youth who are both racial and sexual minorities. I chose Black men, rather than other racial minority men, because a larger body of literature exists documenting the experiences of Black sexual minority people than other racial minority groups. Studying the experiences of Latino, Asian, Native American, and other sexual minority men is an important avenue for future research. Yet, because so little academic research has focused on these intersections of race and sexuality, studying one of these groups would have required an amount of foundational research that was beyond the time and resources I had available for the dissertation.



*Sexual Minority Students and Academic Experiences*. Over the past decade, a large body of literature has addressed the experience of sexual minority students in schools. Much of this literature focuses on the frequency of bullying (Poteat and Espelage 2007; Poteat and Rivers 2010; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz 2009) and its harmful psychological effects in late adolescence (Birkett, Espelage & Koenig 2009, Bontempo and D’Augelli 2002) and early adulthood (Toomey et al. 2010, Russell et al. 2011). A smaller body of literature investigates the academic outcomes of sexual minority students. These studies indicate that heterosexist stigma faced by sexual minority students in schools contributes to poor academic outcomes (Kosciw et al. 2013; Pearson, Wilkinson & Muller 2007). At the same time, research and popular media indicate that things may “be getting better” for sexual minority students in school (Savage & Miller 2011). National studies from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) over the past decade show slightly declining rates of homophobic bullying and an increased presence of support for LGBT students in schools (e.g. gay-straight alliances) (Kosciw, Bartkiewicz & Greytak 2014).

Yet relatively little is known about whether this is improving the academic experiences of Black sexual minority men<sup>1</sup>. Even less is known about how experiences in other social institutions—such as families and churches—relate to their schooling (but see Bajali et al. 2012). To understand the experiences of young Black sexual minority men in social institutions, I employ two theories—Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model (1979) and Somer’s theory of narrativity (1994). I combine these perspectives to

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<sup>1</sup> The little research that exists suggests that Black males may have trouble fitting in support groups for LGBT youth, both because they do not feel accepted by predominately White peers in these groups and because controlling images paint Black men as being hyper-heterosexual (Majied 2010; Vaught 2004). When teachers accept these images, they might not even acknowledge that Black gay men are in their schools (McCready 2004, 2009).

understand how narratives about homosexuality within various social settings (schools, families and churches) influence men's access to academically-related social capital.

### **A Social Ecological Systems Perspective**

The central tenet of Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (1979) is that human development occurs through institutional contexts. According to Bronfenbrenner, the ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the interaction between human beings and their immediate developmental settings, the relationships between these settings, and the larger contexts in which these immediate settings are located. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the immediate settings as *microsystems* and *mesosystems*. A microsystem is a "pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 16). For adolescents, these settings include schools, families and churches, among others. In this study, I focus on the experiences of sexual minority men in these microsystems, but I also try to understand how these experiences are influenced by other, interconnected contexts: mesosystems and macrosystems.

The mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), is comprised of the relationship between two or more microsystems in which an adolescent is involved. It is a "system of microsystems" (p. 23). Microsystem settings (e.g. schools, families, and churches) do not influence the developing person independently of one another. For this reason, I consider the experiences of men at home and in church, in addition to their experience in school. Experiences in these other microsystems influence school experiences through the access to academically-related social capital that they provide.

Moving beyond immediate developmental settings, macrosystems refer to the “belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options that are embedded” (p. 31) in microsystems. These macrosystems shape the interactions of young people in their everyday lives. For instance, the idea that heterosexuality is normal sexuality and homosexuality is abnormal sexuality is a belief system widely held in American culture that often stigmatizes sexual minority adolescents in schools, families and churches.

### **Social Capital and the Social Ecological System**

One way to think about the quality of experience within a given microsystem is by measuring the access to social capital that a young person has in that setting. Scholars have defined social capital in various ways (Coleman 1988; Lin 2002; Putnam 1995). For this study, I propose a three-part definition of social capital adapted from Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). In each social setting, an adolescent may or may not have access to relational, cognitive and structural forms of social capital that promote their academic success. Figure 1.1 displays an example of each type of social capital across the microsystems considered in this study.

<i>Figure 1.1. Examples of Social Capital Across Microsystems</i>			
	Relational	Cognitive	Structural
Schools	Sense of belonging to the school community	Shared belief between teachers and student that student can succeed in school	Academic instruction; extracurricular opportunities
Families	Warm, supportive relationship with parents/primary caretakers	Shared academic expectations with parents/ primary caretakers	Parental involvement in child’s schooling

Churches	Sense of belonging to the church community	Moral directives (e.g. hard work ethic) that promote academic success	Cross-generational social ties and network closure
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Cognitive social capital, in this study, refers to academic orientation and motivation. A microsystem offers a high level of cognitive social capital if the people within that setting (particularly those who oversee the development of the adolescent—e.g. parents, teachers, and clergy members) place a high value on education. Adolescents who have access to cognitive capital share these academic values, and are thus motivated in their academic work (Pittman & Richmond 2007).

Structural social capital, in this study, refers to the academic resources present within a microsystem. These resources may be either instrumental or organizational. Instrumental resources include access to people or outside information that might help with education (e.g. cross-generational ties in churches, access to information about applying for college from school counselor) or advocacy in school from other microsystems (e.g. parent advocacy in schools). Organizational social capital includes access to organizational resources that might help with education. Classroom instruction at school and academic resources in the home serve as two forms of organization social capital. Studies show that access to structural (instrumental and organizational) social capital are related to academic success (Klem & Connell 2004; Fredericks & Eccles 2006).

Students with access to relational, cognitive and structural social capital across microsystems have a greater chance of succeeding in school. Myriad factors influence the availability of social capital in microsystems. For instance, macrosociological factors

such as systemic racism and class oppression may depress the availability of social capital in some schools (i.e. through an unequal distribution across schools) or homes (i.e. parents who had less educational opportunity might be less likely to have high academic expectations for their child). Likewise, micro-level factors, such as a teacher's efficacy in classroom instruction or the time parents devote to helping their child with homework, may vary. In this study, however, I focus on how access to social capital already available within a given microsystem changes—or does not change—as sexual minority men progress through the high school years.

Men who face hostile reactions to their sexuality in a given microsystem may experience suppressed access to social capital. For example, a student might lose a peer group when he comes out (relational social capital), become depressed and no longer care about school because of negative reactions to his sexuality at home (cognitive social capital), or experience a loss of cross-generational ties after being rejected in church (structural social capital). On the other hand, men who do not face hostile reactions maintain access to social capital. I refer to the people who control men's access to social capital within a given microsystem as *gatekeepers*. Gatekeepers include staff members and peers at school, parents at home, and religious leaders and fellow congregants at church.

### **Narratives and the Social Ecological System**

The first step toward understanding the sexual minority men's access to academically-related social capital is to account for the variation in gatekeeper reactions to his sexuality across microsystems. This variation is great. For instance, some schools are very supportive of sexual minority students, while others explicitly or implicitly

exclude these students from the school community. Likewise, some parents embrace their sexual minority children, while others shun them. I propose one set of means by which the access to academically-related social capital in microsystems is shaped: narratives.

People use narratives to understand how the world works and to judge the actions of others. In this sense, narratives have a moral element; there are consequences for violating them. Drawing from Swidler's cultural toolkit (1986, 2001), frames and scripts form the building blocks of narratives. Frames are a "way of understanding the world and how it works" (Swidler 2001, p. 22). Since the early twentieth century (as will be discussed in Chapter 2), for instance, Americans have considered heterosexuality normal sexuality and framed homosexuality as abnormal. Along with each frame comes a script which people are expected to follow. For sexual minority people in the United States, this script has involved concealing or attempting to change one's sexual orientation. When individuals choose not to follow the culturally-expected script, they may face consequences. Sexual minority adolescents who choose not to follow the scripts held by gatekeepers in a given microsystem—for instance, by being open about their sexuality—put themselves at risk of losing access to social capital.

Rather than merely documenting individual, gatekeeper reactions in schools, families, and church, I try to understand how these reactions are based in larger sociological phenomenon. It is critical to understand the broader narratives about sexuality in which individual-level narratives are based in order to understand factors that keep negative narratives in place. For the purposes of this study, I consider two higher levels of narratives in which individual-level narratives are grounded: master narratives and public narratives. Each level of narrative fits within the social-ecological model:

master narratives are generated within macrosystems; public narratives within social networks (microsystems and mesosystems<sup>2</sup>); and personal narratives are formulated at the individual level.

*Master Narratives.* Somers (1994) describes master narratives<sup>3</sup> as the “epic dramas of our time” (p. 623) that frame interactions in everyday life. Bronfenbrenner (1979) similarly describes macrosystems as “belief systems” (p. 31) or “bodies of knowledge” (p. 31) at the macro level that guide social relations in microsystems. Master narratives are culture-wide values. They are hegemonic in that, even if some people within a society do not endorse the narrative, they must at least reference it in their dissent. The master narrative regarding sexual identity in American society is the heterosexual-homosexual binary—the belief that heterosexuality is normal (or moral) sexuality and homosexuality is abnormal (or immoral) sexuality. This narrative not only justifies institutional discrimination against sexual minorities, but also influence the actions of gatekeepers towards sexual minority individuals. For instance, the heterosexual-homosexual binary sets the stage for the bullying of gay adolescents in schools, as well as their rejection at home and in church.

*Public Narratives.* Master narratives influence the experience of sexual minority men in microsystems through the generation of public narratives. Somers (1994) describes public narratives as “narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (p. 628). These narratives are generated through social

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<sup>2</sup> Often, public narratives are developed within social networks that include multiple microsystems. For instance, leaders of a religious denomination may promote the narrative that homosexuality is a psychological condition and needs to be addressed through therapy. This will be the hegemonic narrative in every microsystem that is influenced by the denomination (including individual congregations and in the homes of members of those congregations). Because these social networks span multiple microsystems—e.g. networks of congregations, individual congregations and homes—public narratives also operate within mesosystems.

<sup>3</sup> Which she also refers to as *metanarratives*

networks. For instance, they may be developed by members of a school, a religious group, or an ethnic or racial community. They are public in that they are held by groups of individuals; yet, they are more limited in scope than master narratives, as they do not hold hegemonic influence over an entire society. Instead, they are beholden to master narratives. Within various social networks public narratives arise that either align with or contradict master narratives. In this study, public narratives that adopt the tenets of the heterosexual-homosexual binary will be referred to simply as *narratives*; public narratives that contradict this master narrative will be referred to as *counternarratives*.

The most powerful members of a social network have the greatest influence on which public narratives are developed and enforced in microsystems. For instance, school leaders may endorse a public narrative about homosexuality either consciously or unconsciously, and enforce this narrative through school practices and policies. Likewise, religious leaders may develop public narratives about homosexuality from the pulpit and enforce this narrative formally (through church or denominational policies) or informally (through the treatment of sexual minority people in the religious community).

*Individual-Level Narratives.* Individuals draw on public narratives about homosexuality in developing their individual narratives. Public narratives are hegemonic within a given social network in that individuals must grapple with the narratives that are dominant in the network. For instance, an adolescent who attends a school where the dominant public narrative about homosexuality is negative (e.g. that sexual minority men are not “real men”) must confront this narrative in developing his own narrative. Likewise, a parent who attends a church where the dominant public narrative is negative (e.g. that gay people are going to hell) must deal with this narrative in thinking about and



responding to their son's sexuality. In some cases, there may be great pressure to conform to the dominant narrative within the microsystem. In this dissertation, I distinguish between two types of individual-level narratives. I refer to the public narratives that men have adopted about their own sexuality as personal narratives. I refer to the public narratives that gatekeepers in schools, families, and churches adopt as *gatekeeper narratives*.

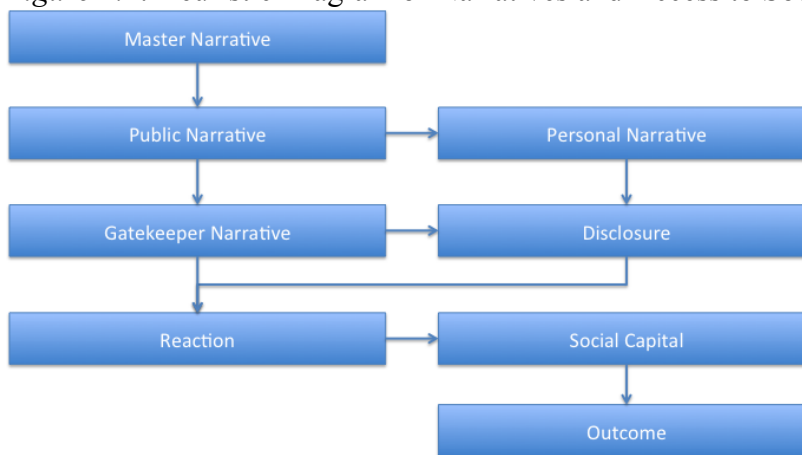
Gatekeeper narratives play a central role in determining the access to social capital that sexual minority men have in a given microsystem. Men who choose not to follow the scripts of gatekeeper narratives might be punished by gatekeepers within various microsystems. Two examples of public narratives that gatekeepers might adopt are the "Politics of Respectability" narrative and the "Real Man" narrative. According to the "Politics of Respectability" narrative, only procreative (and thus heterosexual) forms are framed as socially acceptable; sexual minority people must refrain from same-sex intimacy. A man who chooses to enter a same-sex relationship may be looked down upon by members of his family or religious community who hold this narrative. According to the "Real Man" narrative, men must meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., they must be heterosexual and gender-conforming) to earn respect amongst their male peers; sexual minority men should meet these requirements by hiding their sexuality (and possibly by engaging in heterosexual relationships). Men who fail to meet these requirements by either being open about their non-heterosexuality or not conform to gender stereotypes (through their mannerisms and activities, for instance) may experience derision from male peers who hold this narrative.

Many narratives have no script for the sexual minority person to follow. These narratives (e.g. the “It’s Disgusting” narrative, in which gay people are objects of visceral disgust) view sexual minority people as have a completely “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963) that is beyond the point of redemption through hiding or attempts to change one’s sexuality. Furthermore, even when a script is provided, the script may prove either impossible (as in the case with sexual orientation change in the “You Can Change” narrative) or so psychologically damaging (as in the case with staying in the closet in the “Politics of Respectability” and “Real Man” narratives) that many sexual minority men violate the script regardless of the consequences.

In Appendix B, I discuss three categories of narratives addressing homosexuality: religious narratives, community narratives, and individual rights narratives. Each of these categories operates on a different set of psychological mechanisms. Gatekeepers thus react in different ways to violations of these narratives. When a sexual minority man violates the script held by a gatekeeper, the gatekeeper may react with disgust, contempt or fear, depending on the narrative that he or she holds. This reaction may disrupt the man’s access to social capital in that microsystem. For instance, a student who comes out at school where the “Real Man” narrative is dominant—and is held by many of his male peers—may lose male friends and become the target of bullying. Both of these reactions reduce his sense of belonging in school (relational social capital). A young man whose parents held a “Politics of Respectability” narrative may experience tension in his relationship with them when he comes out. Shifting away from their values regarding sexuality, he may shift away from other values that he once shared with them—including values that promoted academic achievement (cognitive social capital). Or an adolescent

may be shunned from his church community after he fails or refuses to change his sexual orientation (in a church where the “You Can Change” narrative is dominant) , thus losing access to cross-generational ties (structural capital). The loss of access to any of these forms of social capital may hinder the academic pursuits of sexual minority men. Figure 1.2 depicts a hypothesized pathway between narratives about sexuality to the academic outcomes of Black sexual minority men.

*Figure 1.2. Heuristic Diagram of Narratives and Access to Social Capital*



## Research Questions

In this study, I investigated the link between gatekeeper narratives, the reaction of gatekeepers to the sexuality of study men, and the man’s subsequent access to academically-related social capital in a given microsystem<sup>4</sup>. I also tried to understand how the public narratives from which gatekeepers develop their view of homosexuality are anchored within larger sociological phenomenon that relate to sexuality and race in American society. I addressed three primary research questions:

<sup>4</sup> While the link between study men’s access to social capital and their subsequent academic outcomes is also of interest, it is not the focus of this study.

1. What master narratives about homosexuality anchor the public narratives from which institutional gatekeepers draw to develop their individual (gatekeeper) narratives about homosexuality?
2. How do gatekeeper narratives operate across microsystems? That is, in what ways do these narratives shape reactions to study men? Specifically, what gatekeeper narratives are the most harmful in terms of blocking access to social capital<sup>5</sup>?
3. How are losses in different forms of academically-related social capital related to one another?

## **Methods**

I divided my analyses into three tasks. In the first task, I addressed the master narratives of heterosexism and racism, and contemplated how these master narratives intersect to frame the public narratives generated within social networks. I relied on previous historical literature to complete this task. In the second task, I generated a list of public narratives about homosexuality generated within Black communities. I analyzed texts of Black religious and community leaders, as well as community members, which address homosexuality. I focused on public narratives within the Black community for two reasons. First, because the public narratives about sexuality within Black communities draw from both master narratives of sexuality and race, a greater number of public narratives may exist within Black communities than in predominantly White communities (which draw only upon the master narrative of sexuality<sup>6</sup>). As a result, public narratives about homosexuality in Black communities include all of the narratives present within predominantly White communities plus narratives that stem from the

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<sup>5</sup> I am particularly interested in which types of narratives are associated with the most extreme gatekeeper reactions. For instance, what narratives compel a parent to push their child out of the house or an educator to remove a sexual minority student from the school community?

<sup>6</sup> Narratives about normal sexuality (heterosexuality) in American society have assumed Whiteness as the starting point. Some narratives about homosexuality in Black communities are responses to racist beliefs that Black women and men have an abnormal sexuality. These narratives frame homosexuality as unacceptable, in order to overcome these racist beliefs. Because White communities have not had to deal with these forms of racism, they have not had to develop these additional narratives about homosexuality.

historical experience of racism. Second, few studies have addressed the breadth of narratives about homosexuality in Black communities specifically.

In the third task, I interviewed 40 Black sexual minority men about their experiences in schools, families and churches. I asked study men about the narratives that gatekeepers in each of these microsystems held about homosexuality, as well as the reactions of these gatekeepers when the study man came out (or was presumed to be gay). I also investigated the relationship between different types of gatekeeper reactions and the access to social capital that study men have access across microsystems. (The link between gatekeeper reaction and access to social capital is depicted in Figure 2.) I considered the mechanisms by which access to social capital is affected<sup>7</sup> as well as the relationship between the losses of access to different forms of social capital (relational, cognitive and structural).

For this study, I relied primarily on qualitative methods. While quantitative studies of Black sexual minority people have increased in recent years—with the Social Justice Sexuality Project and the Black Youth Project as two examples—relatively little research has focused on Black sexual minority populations outside the public health field. National studies, such as the National Survey of Adolescent Health, offer opportunities to study the educational experiences of sexual minority youth. Yet the number of Black sexual minority youth in these studies are too small for meaningful quantitative analysis. The lack of adequate quantitative data about Black sexual minority youth and education is one reason why I have chosen qualitative methods.

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, do institutional gatekeepers block social capital (as is the case when a student is kicked out of their home or school)? Or does access to social capital diminish as the relationship between gatekeepers and the sexual minority man weakens?

Another reason is that a qualitative approach—in the form of semi-structured interviews—allows the voices of Black sexual minority men to be heard. Although crucial, epidemiological studies of Black sexual minority men may not paint a full picture of their experiences—particularly if the studies exist in isolation. Over the past several years, a number of studies have employed qualitative methods in studying Black sexual minority men (e.g., Carter 2013; Johnson 2008; Pitt 2009, 2010). These studies have produced fruitful findings in the area of health, religion and education. I hope that this dissertation project will similarly allow the voices of Black sexual minority men to be heard in a way that is helpful to researchers and interested readers alike. Appendix A. contains a full description of the study methodology.

This study faces a number of limitations. The first limitation involves sampling. Because I recruited the interview sample through LGBT organizations, the men to whom I spoke are publicly open about their non-heterosexuality. While it would have been interesting to interview men who had not yet publicly disclosed their sexual identity, finding such men would have been very difficult. Furthermore, the vast majority of men to whom I spoke have achieved a high level of academic success—that is, most graduated from high school and went on to post-secondary education. Because academic success is of interest in the study, it would have been useful to have more variation. Nevertheless, even though study men eventually achieved academic success, many of them faced challenges along the way (often due to the reaction of others to their non-heterosexuality). Perhaps more than others, these men also received a great deal of support (academic and social). Documenting this support—and considering how lack of

access to such support may be a detrimental factor to sexual minority outside the study—forms a key component of this study.

Another consideration in my ability to conduct interviews and interpret data with validity is my subjectivity as a researcher. Qualitative researchers discuss the dangers and benefits of having both an insider and an outsider status in relation to interview respondents (Hellawell 2006; Mullings 1999). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note that in almost every case, researchers fall somewhere on the spectrum between insider and outsider status. This is the case for me. I am an insider in that I am a sexual minority man, and share the same religious background (Christianity) as many of the study men. I am an outsider in that I am White and have experienced neither racism nor challenges of balancing sexual and racial minority statuses. One benefit of being both gay and Christian is that study men may have spoken more freely to me about the challenges of being a sexual minority person—particularly in church (Adler 1990). A drawback to identifying with study men in this way is that I might have projected my own experiences onto them both through my probing of their experiences (i.e. asking about particular reactions to their sexual minority status in school, home and church) and in my interpretation of interview data. For instance, I might too easily have connected the experience of a study man to my own experiences when developing coding schemes and writing the analysis (Watson 2001).

One benefit of being an outsider is that I did not experience role conflict in being a *Black* sexual minority person. This outsider status may have reduced the risk that I was not objective in my analysis<sup>8</sup> (Asselin 2003; Branbuck & Coghlan 2007). A drawback of being an outsider is that I do not have intimate knowledge of what it means to be Black

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<sup>8</sup> Although I still ran this risk in sharing a sexual minority status

(i.e. the experiences of positive racial socialization or the experiences of interpersonal and institutional discrimination). I relied more on academic literature about the experiences of Black sexual minority men in framing both the interview questions and data analysis. By relying on academic literature rather than personal experience, I may have applied concepts from previous studies to the experiences of study men that do not capture these experiences accurately. Furthermore, because I do not share insider status in terms of racial identity, study men may have not been as comfortable talking to me about their experiences of racism (as opposed to sexual orientation discrimination).

### **Interview Profiles**

With these limitations in mind, recruitment of the study men that I interviewed began summer 2014 when I visited with organizations in five cities—New York, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco and Washington, DC—that worked with Black LGBT populations. For regions of the country I was not able to visit, I contacted organizations over the phone and via e-mail. Members of these organizations helped connect me to potential participants by providing them contact information and a brief description of the study. Interested individuals contacted me via phone or e-mail and we scheduled an interview session. In some cases, the people whom I contacted fell within the sample parameters and volunteered to participate in an interview. In other cases, men whom I interviewed forwarded information about the study to others who might be interested. About one-third of the research sample was recruited through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted either in-person or over the telephone and generally lasted between one and two hours. In this section, I introduce the stories of study men—when



they came to realize their sexual orientation, their experiences in various microsystems, how they came to accept their sexuality, and what they are doing today.

Isaac (20) grew up with his mother, brother and his mother's boyfriend in a small Southern city. Growing up was a constant fight for Isaac. He was bullied in school. He was pushed out of his home. And he felt rejected by the Black community: "In the Black community, you get frowned on by your own people. That's what makes it harder, by your own people." This rejection was especially hurtful for Isaac because his town has a long history of racial discrimination that carries into the present (Black citizens were essentially shut out from political representation until very recently). The Black community is strong and tight-knit. Isaac attended his family's church, where he learned that gay people were "abominations" and were "going to hell." He felt that everyone was disappointed with him, yet he was tenacious. He made it through high school. He did not believe his church's narratives about homosexuality, and eventually found a church that affirmed him. Today he still lives near his childhood home, and is an outspoken voice for sexual minority people in the Black community.

Alex (23) grew up with his mother in a large Southern city. He belongs to a family of Apostolic preachers, who spoke of gay people as "abominations." He believed them. When Alex was young, his older cousin came out and was disowned by his parents. From that time, Alex lived in constant fear that he too might be rejected, if his mother found out about his sexuality. This did not happen. When Alex was outed to his mother at 17 after she found a series of text messages on his phone that revealed his involvement with another boy, she ignored it. Although he was relieved, his mother's silence weighed on him. Alex continued to struggle with his sexuality through college. Things turned

around when Alex was introduced to a Black church near his campus that affirmed gay people. Alex no longer viewed himself as an abomination, but once again believed that he was “filled with God’s spirit.” Today, Alex is involved in a group that works with queer men of color to advance their career goals. Through his involvement in the group, he hopes to break the stereotypes of gay men that are often held in the Black community—that they are “lazy, bitter, effeminate or on the down low.”

Owen (25) grew up with his mother, father and brother in Central California. He regularly heard older men in barbershops using derogatory words about gay men—that they were “sweet.” When Owen first realized that he was attracted to boys, he “hated it.” Seeing two men kiss on Christina Aguilera’s “Beautiful” music video made him want to throw up in disgust: “I don’t know if I felt sick to my stomach because I realized that I was gay. There was a lot of guilt associated with it.” He tried to change his sexuality by regulating his speech and trying to date girls. When these attempts failed, Owen was deeply distressed. He eventually found support online: “There was a lack of judgment. Being able to talk with somebody about my sexuality, reading about these stories online was incredibly helpful.” Owen graduated high school with honors, and went on to study Sociology at an elite public university. Recently, he received a prestigious fellowship to conduct research on the self-care that Black sexual minority people find in the Twitter community.

Andre (20) grew up with his father in a small Southern City. Andre’s father made derisive comments about gay men, implying that they were not real men. This hurt Andre. Early in high school, he was outed to his father, who told him, ‘Things are going to change.’ Things declined so quickly at home that Andre was forced to move to

Atlanta, where his grandmother lived. Andre thought that he would find more openness to his sexuality in the bigger city. He was right. Through a lesbian friend at his new school, Andre was connected to a mentor that helped him to accept his sexuality and to get back on track with school. (Rejection at home and a lack of support in his previous school took a heavy toll on Andre's mental state, which caused him to give up on schoolwork.) Andre graduated and went to college near his hometown. He serves as a leader in a fraternity that provides leadership opportunities for Black gay men.

Joseph (25) grew up with his aunt and uncle in the rural South. He attended a predominantly White Southern Baptist church, where he was told that gay people go to hell if they did not repent from their same-sex attractions. Joseph was always suspicious of this message. Yet it made him feel hyper-visible: "Every time they would talk about things from the Bible, that homosexuality was a sin. I felt like they were directly to me." These messages made him hide at church. Joseph hid at home, too. His uncle, who was White, was a "John Wayne" type of man. Joseph knew that his uncle would not be able to understand his homosexuality. He collaborated with the rest of his family—to whom he was already out—to stay closeted at home. Having grown up in mostly White setting, Joseph longed to connect with his racial community, and chose to attend a nearby HBCU (historically Black college). It was there that Joseph not only "became an advocate for his race," but also gained his voice in advocating for Black LGBT people. He opened up the conversation about homosexuality on his campus. For his advocacy work, a leading Black LGBT organization named Joseph as an emerging leader to watch.

Ethan (25) grew up with his mother and grandmother in the suburb of large Southern city. Church played an integral role in Ethan's childhood. His religious

community was his racial community as well as his extended family. It provided him with a great deal of support in figuring out how to be a successful Black man. It did not teach him how to be a *gay* Black man, however. Although the church remained mostly silent on the issue of homosexuality, Ethan got the strong sense that members of his church would not approve. His suspicions were confirmed when his mother found out that he was gay. She angrily confronted Ethan in front of the entire family. The two spoke little for six months, although they share a close relationship now. He grew increasingly distant from his church community during this time.

Ethan found support in his step team at school—one of the last places that he expected to find it. He worried that the “hyper-masculine” boys would reject him. Not wanting to lose another connection to the Black community, Ethan stayed quiet. When he finally confided in his step team sponsors that he was gay, they embraced him. They also made sure that his peers respected him. Ethan went on to receive his Bachelor’s degree and today coaches the step team at his old high school. Ethan hopes to make the school a safe space for gay students, as his step team advisors did for him.

Fred (25) grew up with his mother in a large Southern city. Confident and outgoing, Fred got along well with his classmates; he was a friend with everybody, from football players to the people in the student government. He grew up with them, and coming out to them was a non-event. They accepted Fred immediately. On occasions when students harassed him, his friends protected him. Fred had more trouble with his mother, who did not understand his sexuality. Their relationship cooled after she discovered that Fred was gay, which hurt him during his later years of high school. They reconnected when he tested positive for HIV. She now wants to spend “every waking

moment” with her son. Fred went on to graduate and received a Bachelor’s degree from an HBCU near his home. Today, he works as an HIV intervention specialist. He hopes to serve as a role model for young Black men who are living with HIV.

Joshua (28) grew up with his mother and father in a large Southern City. From a young age, Joshua served as a pastor in his Holiness Pentecostal church. He is a naturally gifted speaker. Yet, his church’s disapproval of homosexuality (based on the belief that gay people are demon possessed) drove him into deep hiding. Joshua lived a “double life” for a time—preaching on Sundays and having relationships with men during the week. This ended when he was outed to his church leadership. Soon after, Joshua was in a life-threatening car accident. The traumatic event immediately reshaped his priorities. He resolved to live authentically. Joshua came out to his parents as bisexual. Glad that he was alive, they accepted his sexual orientation. Today, they share a warm relationship. Joshua did not graduate from high school, but obtained a technical degree and is a skilled blue-collar worker. He later attended a church that affirmed his sexuality. There, he could offer his speaking skills without hiding.

Cameron (19) grew up with his father in California. They attended a Missionary Baptist Church with the rest of the extended family. Cameron remembers his father and other family members talking negatively about gay men. He grew up thinking: “What the hell am I?” Cameron gained confidence when he entered high school. The leadership—some of whom were gay themselves—worked hard to make the school a safe space for sexual minority students. When Cameron’s father found out that he was gay, he was outraged and struck Cameron. He moved out of the house for a period of months. His counselor and other teachers supported him through this difficult period, and he

graduated from high school. He now attends an HBCU in the South. There, he is working with the local HRC (Human Rights Campaign) director to document what it means to be “Black, gay, and Christian” in the South. Cameron hopes to give young, Black gay Christians the confidence that God loves them and honors their relationships.

Xavier (29) grew up with his mother and father in a large Mid-Atlantic city. He regularly heard people in the Black community make jokes about gay men—that they were not real men. He similarly noticed that Black gay men on television shows like *In Living Color* were usually “the butt of the joke.” These messages made Xavier feel both shame for his own sexuality and contempt for gay men who were less masculine than he is:

I became effemiphobic to a certain degree. I tried to dissociate anything that was effeminate about myself, while at the same time people were disowning me for being gay. It was just me self-projecting my inner hate.

Xavier concealed his sexuality during high school and went to a Christian college where he hoped to change his sexual orientation. When he was unsuccessful, he became deeply depressed and fell into substance abuse.

Xavier eventually found support in his Christian friends, who cared more about his well-being than his sexuality. Xavier transferred schools and graduated with honors. After college, he moved to a larger Northeastern city where he became an advocate for sexual minority people of color. There he became frustrated in dealing with predominately White, LGBT organizations and he founded his own organization. Xavier and his volunteers work for the inclusion of young LGBT people of color in local schools and churches. Xavier works one-on-one with pastors of Black churches, moving them towards acceptance of their gay parishioners. This process has been difficult, but

successful. Today, Xavier's organization is based in a Black church. He takes this as a sign of success.

Drake (27) grew up with his mother in the South and moved to a large Midwestern city when he was in middle school. The move was difficult. Drake did not fit in with other boys. The respectful demeanor that he had learned in the South was not tough enough in his new, urban environment, and he became the target of homophobic bullies. As Drake began to accept his sexuality, however, he ignored the voice of bullies. His grades picked up when he transferred school where homophobic bullying was less prevalent. After high school, Drake worked with an HIV outreach organization that focused on the unique needs of young Black men living in urban poverty. Today, Drake serves as an organizer for one of the nation's oldest festivals for the Black LGBT community. Last year, he won a national award honoring his advocacy for young Black gay men.

Elijah (22) grew up with his mother and younger siblings in a large Mid-Atlantic city. Elijah attended a non-denominational church where homosexuality was condemned on the occasional case when it was mentioned. Gay people not only went to hell, but they would also cause the downfall of civilization, according to church leaders. Elijah remained closeted at home and in school. To divert attention from his sexuality, he even joined in the bullying of another gay student. Elijah attended a Catholic college, where he didn't feel like he fit in. There was a small gay group on campus—which was otherwise unsupportive of sexual minorities—but it was made up of only White students. He left the school. The dean of the university reached out to Elijah, and implored him to come back to college. Elijah blossomed when he came back to school. Today, he is the

President of the College Democrats on his campus, and has begun to accept his identity as a gay man. This year, he was accepted into a national leadership cohort for young Black gay men.

Isaiah (29) grew up with his mother and father in a Southern city. Isaiah was teased in his neighborhood when he was young, but gained confidence in his sexuality through high school and even more so in college and graduate school. Isaiah's parents were worried about his safety and health when they learned that he was gay, but eventually came to support him. Today, Isaiah provides health and social services to sexual minority people in his local community.

Jarrett (22) grew up with his mother and younger brother in the suburb of a large Southern city. Although he was never taught to dislike gay people, he knew that homosexuality was “frowned upon” in the Black community. In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Jarrett came out to his mother in a letter. She said that she loved him, but did not want homosexuality in the house. Their relationship grew volatile over the following years. She first put Jarrett out of the house and then asked him to come back. Jarrett hated being gay because of this rejection: “At the time I felt disowned, I felt like why am I gay I don't need to be gay. At that point, I was in denial. It's going to be all of this, I don't need this stress in my life.” He grew depressed and dropped out of school. Jarrett's gay friends stepped in at this point. They encouraged him to transfer to a school in the city that was more accepting of gay students. At this supportive school, Jarrett thrived. He became the first junior in high school's history to become class president. Today, he studies journalism at a local university, and is part of an organization that mentors young Black gay men in their career goals.



Bryan (20) grew up with his mother in the rural South, until she died in a car accident when he was 16. He then lived with his sister. Bryan was deeply religious growing up, and got the clear message that gay people were destined for hell. He worried about his growing attraction to men everyday: “I was afraid to sin, and I felt like the thoughts I was having about boys. I was kind of ignored it. I wasn't happy about it, I was scared.” Bryan worked hard to stay in the closet at school. A gifted student, he graduated as a member of the National Honor Society. After serving time in the military, Bryan entered a state university. There, he met other Black gay people for the first time, which changed his life. He never thought that there were gay people like him. Today, Bryan regularly attends the gay-straight alliance at his school and is involved in an organization that helps Black sexual minority men to achieve their career goals.

Devin (28) grew up with his mother and father in New England and moved to the rural South when he was a teenager. This was a difficult move for Devin. While friends in New England accepted his sexuality, classmates in the South bullied him relentlessly. The family’s church regularly spoke about gay people as “abominations.” Devin didn’t believe this message, but it upset him:

I think that my emotions were mixed. I don't think I received it as truth, but it was upsetting to hear that. Just so much hatred and intolerance. But I knew how natural it was for me, it just didn't make sense. I was like you can't talk to me about me. I'm not unnatural. I'm not immoral...I couldn't take it personally.

During his final year of high school, Devin decided to move out of his unaccepting, rural environment. After dropping out of school, Devin moved back to New England on his own. There, he met a mentor—a successful, Black gay man—who helped him to enroll in college after he completed his G.E.D. Today, Devin works as a peer counselor for youth

living with HIV. Just as Devin's mentor was a role model to him, he hopes to be a role model to younger Black gay men. He wants them to know that they can live a fulfilling life with HIV.

James (28) grew up with his mother and father in the suburbs of a Southern city. He was bullied in elementary school for his gender non-conformity and regularly heard negative messages about feminine men in church. He created an imaginary world for himself "behind closed doors" where he could freely express his gender and sexuality. In the outside world, he learned to put on a masculine front. To hide was to survive. Yet, hiding drove James to suicidal depression: "I very much had thoughts of suicide. I never went through with it. But I would write out notes, coming out to my parents and saying that I couldn't change and wanted to go to hell." James' church and family took great pride in their Blackness. So, he and his parents were thrilled when he was accepted into a flagship HBCU. Although the school shied away from the topic of homosexuality, James met his first gay friends on campus. They changed his life, helping James to accept his sexuality for the first time:

From that time on, I developed a whole sense of community. I had never been exposed to gay people in church who unapologetically lived their truth. I got all of this through my experience [in the HBCU]. I saw myself for the first time--Black, gay, queer. That gave me the stability to know that my being Black, gay and loving God was not problematic. It actually made sense because God made me the way I was.

The gay community that James built at his HBCU inspired him to activism. Today, James works at a national organization that serves the needs of Black LGBT people.

Kendrick (20) grew up with his father in a mid-size Southern city. The two attended a Pentecostal church that said that gay people are abominations and are going to hell. Even more than rejection from church or family, Kendrick worried that he would

lose his relationship with God because he is gay: “Growing up I went through the whole trying to get right with God where I tried not to be gay.” Kendrick’s desire to become straight was only compounded when he was bullied at school. Things began to change when he transferred to a new school. Adamant that his son would receive the best education, Kendrick’s father sent him to an academically rigorous boarding school for his junior year. There, Kendrick received incredible support for his sexuality. He was able to come out and receive guidance from his gay resident advisor. After graduating, Kendrick attended a state university, and took a leadership position in an organization that helps Black gay men to be “model citizens” within the Black community.

Clayton (24) grew up with his mother in a large Midwestern city. He attended a Baptist church with his extended family regularly. There, he learned that homosexuality was “unnatural.” Clayton loved God, and wondered why he had to go through the trial of homosexuality:

I think I was just so tired of dealing with it. I was exhausted of dealing with why am I this way, why is this happening to me, praying to God. I never prayed to God to change me. But why did I have to be this way, why can't I be like everyone else. I think that's what was frustrating me so much. I don't understand, I don't understand why this has to happen to me.

Clayton needed to share his struggle with someone, and there was no one he was closer to than his mother. He came out to her. She assured Clayton that she loved and supported him, but was fearful for his safety. His revelation caused tension in their relationship for a time. Without little support during high school, Clayton longed for a safe space at school. He created this space for himself when he entered college. Clayton founded an organization for queer people of color. He forced the conversation of issues facing Black students in the predominantly White LGBT center on campus, and he pushed forward a

dialogue on issues facing gay people within the Black Student Union. He recalls: “We were actually able to do something, we were able to build bridges. It gave me the best of both worlds, I was able to bring my full identity to campus.”

Will (29) grew up with his mother and siblings in California. He attended a Jehovah’s Witness church where he was taught that homosexuals were “abominations” and “will not receive paradise.” Will was pushed out of his church during his senior year of high school when leaders found out that he was gay. Will recalls having a largely White coming out experience. He felt like he never quite belonged in White gay spaces, like PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Will gained confidence in his sexual orientation when he began to realize that his experience as a Black man in the LGBT community was different than his White friends. He wanted to make a space for “Black men to tell their stories.” After college, Will worked for an LGBT community center where he pushed for more discussion of issues facing queer people of color. Recently, he finished a doctorate in education, in which he studied the experiences of queer men of color in college.

Jesse (22) grew up with his mother in a large Midwestern city. A Baptist, she had misgivings about homosexuality (that gay people were hypersexual, would all contract HIV, and may even be child molesters). But she grew to be a powerful advocate for her son as he navigated through high school. Her advocacy began after Jesse helped to found a support group for gay students at his Catholic high school. Jesse had not planned to come out while in school, but supportive friends and priests gave him the confidence to tell his Mom. She was not sure how to react. But she was certain that she would not allow her son to experience discrimination. She stuck up for Jesse in the family’s church, and

regularly asked about his advocacy work. Today, Jesse is pursuing a Ph.D. in sexuality studies and is an accomplished writer. He is deeply committed both to racial and LGBT justice work, and demands that his voice be heard within the Black community: “As a Black gay man, my voice matters and all of our voices matter. We should be out there yelling.” Recently, he was named a young leader to watch by a leading Black LGBT organization.

Eddie (22) grew up with his mother and father in a large Southern city. Church spoke against homosexuality and even tailored their sermons to the topic of homosexuality when Eddie and other gender non-conforming congregants were present. Yet Eddie always considered his sexuality to be natural:

I never felt like loving a man was wrong. Loving a man was natural like breathing, who I belong with, like putting two puzzle pieces together. I never felt anything like a sinner. So when people told me that sinner type of thing, I was like that's different, that's not me.

Eddie identifies as “two-spirit” (he possesses aspects of both masculinity and femininity), drawing strength from “strong Black women” (Diana Ross and Patti LaBelle) and Black transgender women (RuPaul Charles, Laverne Cox, and Janet Mock) in accepting himself. While some male teachers put Eddie down for his gender presentation, most students accepted him. After high school, Eddie enrolled in a nearby HBCU, where he now leads the LGBT student group on campus. He finds inspiration in the community organizing work of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Marcus (27) grew up with his mother and father in a mid-sized Southern city. Marcus’s parents were American Methodist Episcopal (AME) pastors. They made it clear that homosexuality was morally wrong through both their sermons and their exclusion of gay members from the congregation. Marcus saw how gay people were treated in the

Black community and worried that his parents would reject him. Fearful of being found out, he went deep into the closet:

I felt weird at the beginning of it because you know that's something that's not accepted in the African American community. So the people that were openly gay, doing stuff with other men, were stigmatized. And it looked kind of bad if you're a little kid and you see this stuff. You're like, 'Hey, if everybody is supposed to be treated equally, why are we treating this person differently just because they like someone of the same gender as them?' So for me it was, okay this is something weird. It made me go into a closet. You know when you're young you have to be mindful of your surroundings, because you want to make sure you have somewhere to live as well in case your family tries to kick you out for being gay.

When he entered college, Marcus started to question the shaming messages that he heard in church and at home. He had his own conversations with God. He questioned how anyone really knew that gay people would go to hell. They weren't God, after all. Marcus fully accepted himself when he found a Black church that affirmed his sexuality. It was key to Marcus that this church based their teachings in Scripture. Today, Marcus is pursuing his Master's Degree in Health Education. He educates young people in preventing and treating HIV.

Austin (24) grew up with his mother and stepfather in a small Southern city. He attended his family church, which provided him support as a Black youth in a racist environment. He loved church. But when he realized that he might be gay, negative messages about homosexuality from the pulpit (that gay people were going to hell) caused him a great deal of anxiety. He fervently tried to "pray the gay away":

At some times I felt like I was wrong, that everything I was thinking was wrong, that the way I was living my life was wrong. For a while, I felt like me being gay was a choice that I was making, it was something that could be controlled.

When this effort failed, Austin resigned himself to the fact that he is gay. But he didn't like it. He wanted nothing to do with the stereotype of the flamboyant gay person that dominated in his community; to be gay was to be weak. When Austin became the victim of a homophobic attack, he began to realize that things needed to change: "So this was a pivotal moment for me. I was like I don't just want to sit by anymore. There needs to be some type of changes made, somebody speaking for these types of issues." The first change was for Austin to accept himself—for being, Black, gay and HIV positive. With his newfound confidence, he became an advocate. Today, Austin works at a program that assists underprivileged children gain marketable skills. He wants to help students to accept their sexuality when they are still young.

Jamal (24) grew up with his grandparents in a small Southern city. They were leaders in the church, where he attended services multiple times a week. Although the church rarely talked about homosexuality, people in the Black community did. Jamal was regularly teased for being effeminate when he was young, but he had a unique confidence. Jamal was a pioneer, the first person to come out as gay in his high school. He gave other students the confidence to come out as well. Jamal is attending a nearby HBCU, where he is pursuing a degree in Social Work. He started a weekly roundtable on campus for Black gay men to discuss their challenges and successes as they navigate through school. Jamal hopes to take the skills that he has learned in college back into his community. He wants to open up a "safe space" for all people who find themselves outside the community's definition of normal.

Ben (27) grew up with his grandmother in a large Mid-Atlantic city. He always felt like his homosexuality was natural, although "he knew it could not be natural" based

on what he heard in church. The church's messages were strident. Same-sex intimacy was as disgusting as bestiality and involved turning from God into uninhibited lust. These messages affected Ben's grandmother as well. Suspecting that he was in a relationship with one of his male classmates, she confronted Ben about his sexuality. He came out. She promised that she wouldn't judge Ben, but their relationship changed. Ben's grandmother became extremely protective and he experienced "less freedom" than he had before he came out. Although his grandmother was well intentioned, Ben's spirits were lowered after her reaction. A highly gifted student, Ben had trouble focusing in school. Ben managed to graduate with honors, even while distracted by dealing with his sexuality. He gained confidence when he began attending a Black church that affirmed him as a gay man. Today, Ben is pursuing a degree in Theology. He hopes to facilitate reconciliation in families with LGBT youth.

Garrett (22) grew up with his mother and father in a small Mid-Atlantic city. Garrett "never felt too bad" about his sexuality; he just felt different. Garrett's greatest pushback occurred at school, when a teacher called out his sexuality in front of the entire class. Garrett graduated from high school, and is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Sociology. He works for a local organization that conducts safe space mentor training with local educators. He hopes that these students will have as many supportive teachers as he had.

Anthony (26) grew up with his godparents in New England. He attended a Pentecostal church, where his pastor told him that he could turn away from his homosexuality if he sought God's help. Anthony did not accept the "You Can Change" narrative and left the church. Anthony's Mom worried that, as a Black man, he would



experience discrimination in society. Why would want to add being gay to that? These responses weighed on him. But his highly supportive school administration helped to give Anthony the confidence to accept his sexuality. The administration partnered with a local LGBT organization to provide teacher training and to start a Gay-Straight Alliance. From time to time, Anthony faced ridicule, but with the administration's support, he became a leader in the school community. After high school, Anthony joined and helped to lead a fraternity for Black gay men, and today he is pursuing an Associate's Degree in Human Services.

Maurice (24) grew up with his father in a large Midwestern city. He had a conflicted view of his sexuality growing up. He knew that it was natural, but because he heard his father talk with contempt about gay people, he feared coming out. Maurice contracted HIV while in high school. When the administration found out, they held a school-wide meeting. Maurice was prohibited from participating in activities that they believed might put other students at harm. This reaction made Maurice feel incredibly isolated: "It really hurt me because it was the first time I have experienced betrayal from trusted adults in my life." Maurice's mentor (a retired Army Sergeant) guided him through the rest of high school. He acted as a second father when Maurice's own father rejected him. Maurice graduated from high school, and has dedicated his life to HIV advocacy work. He ran the operations for a youth center that worked with teenagers at risk of contracting HIV and assisted in HIV research at a local hospital. For his work, Maurice has been invited to speak at the President's Advisory Council, the UN Headquarter, and the United States Conference on AIDS. Recently, Maurice and his

father reconciled, and his father is now an enthusiastic supporter of Maurice's work in the LGBT community.

Darien (28) grew up with his mother, father and siblings in the suburbs of a Northwestern city. Although his mother was supportive of gay people, the rest of his family enacted a "politics of respectability" around the topic of sexuality. This was most clear when his father came out as gay: "When my Dad came out, his siblings definitely didn't want to talk about it. It was very much, 'Just be silent.'" Darien combined this mandated silence with fears of being outed in school in his decision to hide his sexuality. He was determined to "pass" as straight. Over time, however, passing wore on Darien, making him view his sexuality as a burden:

And I thought that passing in some ways was very exhausting to me. Because I was always worried about did I do this or say too much or did my gaze linger too long somewhere. And I thought about those things all the time. Am I sending too much signal and someone is picking up? And I'm now making myself too vulnerable.

Darien overcame these fears in college, where he found a Black, gay mentor. Darien's mentor encouraged him to "step up" and use his intellectual gifts to fight the HIV epidemic. Darien created an advocacy group for young Black gay men, which addresses structural factors associated with the HIV epidemic. Today, Darien is recognized as a leading expert in addressing HIV/AIDS in Black communities. He hopes to shift the narrative of HIV by empowering young Black men, who have too often been treated as statistics in the epidemic.

Jonathan (23) grew up with his mother in a large Midwestern city. He attended a church that regularly talked about gay people as disgusting to God. Jonathan hoped that his same-sex attraction would go away. When it did not, he became anxious. Jonathan

came to accept his sexuality through an extracurricular group at school. More accepting that any environment he had experienced, this group allowed Jonathan to explore the possibility of living happily as a gay man:

I had never been in an environment like that up until that point. I began to get to know people more, to open up and show my true colors. You know I met a lot of LGBTQ people. Just being around people of all sexual orientations, gender expressions. Every person brought their true selves to that room. Nobody put anyone down for it. So seeing that opened my eyes to the possibility of living an open and honest life as a Black gay man. Not only did I see myself reflected in those people, but there were people who didn't look anything like me that were able to relate to me and affirm me for who I was, and vice versa.

After high school, Jonathan became active in the House/Ball scene, where he “attacks effemiphobia through voguing.” Jonathan’s house mentor encouraged him to pursue higher education, so that he could become an effective ally in the fighting the HIV epidemic. Currently, Jonathan is pursuing a Master’s in Social Work and conducts research on HIV prevention outreach strategies in the House/Ball scene.

Carter (24) grew up with his mother and grandmother in the suburb of a large, Southwestern city. He struggled with narratives both at home and church that homosexuality was not natural. During this time, Carter devoted all of his attention to school:

I used school as an escape route to deal with my family. I threw myself into school, because it gave me a cover of I'm diverting questions away from my sexual orientation and gender identity. They would be like oh Carter's so busy with school, that's why he doesn't have a girlfriend.

At his predominantly White high school, Carter was open about his sexual identity. Yet, he felt the need to cover his racial identity to be accepted by White students—it was “social survival.” Carter attended an elite public university, where he was determined not to hide his sexual or his racial identity. He founded two groups for sexual minority people

of color. One provided psychosocial support to Black gay men, and focused on helping them to adopt positive narratives about their sexuality. Another group aimed at making other groups on campus aware of the intersectional issues facing queer people of color. In 2013, the White House recognized him as an emerging LGBT leader. Today, Carter works at a national LGBT organization, where he leads HIV initiatives and has raised awareness within the organization about issues facing Black LGBT people.

Tyler (24) grew up with his mother and brother in a large Mid-Atlantic city. He didn't "feel bad" about his sexuality, but knew that it was "frowned upon by his community." Tyler's mother suspected that her son might be gay from the time that he was young. Because she knew a number of gay people through her work as a nurse to HIV patients, she was comfortable with the idea of Tyler being gay. She wanted to make sure that he accepted himself, and talked about sexuality with him often. Tyler's mother is Muslim, but she never "forced her religion" on him. For both her and Tyler, religion is about peace and love. Tyler is currently pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Public Health at a local university. He works in a youth program, where he provides life skills to adolescents who are affected by HIV.

Nathan (24) grew up with his Mom and brother in a large Mid-Atlantic city. He always felt that he was born gay. But having heard "code words" in barbershops when growing up—that gay people were weak or "sissies"—he knew that homosexuality was frowned upon in the Black community. Nathan attended a Baptist church, where he was heavily involved in the music program. At church, he heard that homosexuality was "not natural" and that the Bible condemned it, and he eventually left. This was a tumultuous time for Nathan. He had no one with whom to talk to about his sexuality, and his grades

slipped from A's and B's to C's. But Nathan was resilient. He views himself as a perpetual underdog—he is Black and grew up in a very poor neighborhood. Stigma around homosexuality would be one more thing that he would overcome. Nathan turned around his grades later in high school. He received a full university scholarship from his local government and chose to attend an HBCU. There, he met gay friends who helped him to accept his sexuality fully.

Christopher (25) grew up with his mother in a large Mid-Atlantic city. He attended a Baptist church that taught that homosexuality was against nature. Christopher felt shamed by the church: “I felt shame, shame of what I was thinking, shame of what I was doing, cause I wasn't lived up to supposed standards.” An extremely gifted student, Christopher received a scholarship to an elite public university. In college, he realized that he needed to come out for the sake of other Black gay men who also were struggling with their sexuality. By coming out on Facebook, he hoped to “send a signal of hope” to these men. Fully out, Christopher launched into leadership. He founded a student group for sexual minority students of color (as an alternative to the Queer Student Union, which was composed of only White, middle class students):

It was a dual purpose. I wanted it to be a social place for queer people of color. I also wanted to use it for community education. Because most of the images surrounding gay people are not representative. When most people think of gay, they think of White, thin and upper middle class. You know like *Will & Grace* or the TV show *Queer as Folk*. That's definitely not representative of gay people or the diversity that exists amongst queer people.

Christopher brought in author E. Patrick Harris to tell the stories of Black gay men that were more representative than the media. The event was hugely successful, drawing

hundreds of gay and straight students. After college, Christopher joined Teach for America. He is now pursuing an MBA at a top-tier business school.

Jayden (28) grew up with his mother and sister in a small Mid-Atlantic city. Although Jayden attended a church that was unaccepting of homosexuality, he feared the Black community's reaction to his sexuality most. Homosexuality violated "African American values" that place a high value on heterosexual marriage and childrearing:

It was a very traditional African American community. The idea was that everyone would get married, have children, and be heterosexual. I would say very heterocentric, very patriarchal. You know, the man is the head of the house. The woman is to be submissive, should be the childrearer. So, I was worried how I would be received for being gay, for not wanting to get married right away, and for not necessarily wanting to have kids.

Jayden faced frequent taunting in the classroom, but managed to graduate high school with honors. He attended an elite public college in California, where he met other Black gay people through community organizing work. They were fully out *and* fully a part of the Black community. They helped him to see a future for himself. Jayden went on to advocate publicly against Proposition 8 (a measure to ban same-sex marriages in California), and today attends law school, where he is the co-editor for a journal that addresses legal issues facing low-income, Black Americans.

Michael (26) grew up with his mother in a large Mid-Atlantic city when he was young, and then with a teacher and later his step team sponsors when he was in high school. Although he grew up with few resources, he was a highly gifted student. Michael knew that he was gay, and he worried that he would not be able to give back to his community by raising children. But he knew that he could give back by doing well in school and becoming an educator for other Black youth:

School became my place to run, my haven. School is what I got so much respect for. He's a smart young man, he's going to be a powerful man when he's older. And so for me, it's like oh shit, people like this part. I can give them this. I may not be able to give them children or be a good husband. You know these messages of you've got to be part of helping the Black community grow. Sometimes it was about having children. But I knew I couldn't do that. So for me it was, I'm going to be smart, I'm going to contribute by being a good teacher. That was my focus.

Michael was also deeply connected to his church. Leaders at the church considered the well-spoken youth “preacher material.” He felt alienated from his church, however, when he realized that the churches messages against gay people applied to him. This alienation caused him great anxiety. Yet Michael succeeded at school and received a scholarship to a state university. There, he met a Sociology instructor who helped him to accept his sexuality by connected him to an affirming church:

I fell in love with this woman. She is a masculine performing, female identified individual who is a lesbian. She's like, ‘Let's talk more.’ She was like, ‘Where's your support system? Where do go to when you're not in school. Who do you get to go to when you want love?’ And I said, ‘Nobody.’ And she said, we have to change that. And so she ended up doing research, and she found [a Black church that affirms LGBT people].

In his affirming church, Michael grew into a confident gay man. Today, he is fulfilling his dream of being an educator to the Black community. He is pursuing a doctoral degree in Education, in which he is studying the role of racism in academic spaces. He hopes to develop a curriculum for Black students from poor backgrounds that draws from their experiences and uses their own language.

William (26) grew up with his mother and father, siblings, and grandfather in the rural South. The family was poor, but his mother started a business and elevated the family to middle class status. William transferred to an elite private school, where he excelled academically. Focusing on academics allowed William to divert attention from

his developing sexuality. Based on religious messages, William believed that gay people would go to hell and feared this might be the case for him as well. He could not face this stress at an early age, and pushed all thoughts about sexuality out of his mind until late in high school. When William eventually came out to his parents, his mother assured him the “God did not make him this way,” but his father stuck up for him. This gave him confidence. He recalls: “[My Dad] said you're our son, and we will love you no matter what. That was the message that I took away, and that's what I was looking for.” William slowly gained confidence in his sexual identity while attending an Ivy League college. He attended a national leadership conference for young Black gay men this year.

Terrance (29) grew up with his mother, siblings and aunts in South Africa. Both his siblings and classmates teased him mercilessly for not being masculine enough. His parents and teachers allowed the teasing to continue, believing that Terrance would eventually grow into manhood. He felt utterly isolated:

Nobody was there. Nobody. There was no awareness in schools to stop bullying based on sexual orientation. What happened was I had to be my own supervisor. I was surrounded by a lot of negativity and an environment that was against me. I had to be satisfied with living my own gay life inside me. And my inside was completely my world. But there was no support. And there was no hope. No teachers would intervene, no friends, no parent, no nothing.

Terrance has a fighting spirit, however. While this spirit led Terrance to fight the bullies in his hostile high school environment, it led him to advocacy in college. Terrance enrolled in an HBCU, joining the LGBT student group immediately upon arriving at campus. His advocacy work blossomed. Terrance represented his school at a national HBCU summit for LGBT students. He lobbied on Capitol Hill with Melvin L. Watt for



the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. And he currently hosts a video blog, where he interviews young Black gay leaders from around the United States.

Jeff (27) grew up with his mother, father and brother in a large Midwestern city. The family attended a Catholic church that also served as a home base for the city's Rwandan immigrant community. It wasn't easy to grow up gay, Rwandan and Catholic. Sexuality was "swept under the rug" in Jeff's church and family. He knew that he needed to keep his sexuality a secret. Jeff was outed to his parents when he was diagnosed with HIV at 16. They fiercely supported their son, but struggled to talk about his sexuality. When Jeff came out to his father again in college, he received his blessing: "As long as you're a good man, it doesn't matter who you love." A gifted student and artist, Jeff graduated from an Ivy League college. Today, he is comfortable with his sexuality, but does not broadcast it. Only the people closest to Jeff know that he is gay.

These are the stories of the study men whose voices and experiences in schools, families and churches are highlighted in this dissertation. In the following section, I provide an overview of the dissertation chapter organization.

### **Chapter Preview**

In Chapter 2, I discuss the master narratives of heterosexism and racism. These narratives affect Black sexual minority men both by silencing them and by framing public narratives about homosexuality within Black communities<sup>9</sup>. In Chapter 3, I discuss the public narratives about homosexuality that exist within Black communities today. Although silence characterized the treatment of sexual minority people in Black communities historically, there has been greater openness to discussion of the issue over

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<sup>9</sup> And American society more generally

the past decade, an openness accelerated by President Obama's advocacy for LGBT Americans.

In Chapters 4 through 6, I discuss the role that gatekeeper narratives have on the access of sexual minority men to academic-related social capital in microsystems, beginning in Chapter 4 with the access that sexual minority men have to social capital in schools. Schools act as a "microcosm" of the imagined community discussed in Chapter 2. The cultural default in school communities is to uphold hegemonic masculinity, but there are exceptions. In Chapter 5, I discuss the access to social capital that men have in families. Parents of study men reacted in diverse ways when their son came out. These different reactions relied in part on the narrative that the parent has adopted about homosexuality. Different parent narratives and reaction patterns were associated with varying levels of social capital loss for study men. In chapter 6, I discuss the experience of men in churches. Churches serve as an important source of social capital for Black youth. It is thus important to understand the reaction of churches to sexual minority youth, and the effect that this reaction has to the youth's access to social capital.

In the concluding chapter, I address the three research questions. I review the master and public narratives from which gatekeepers drew in reacting to study men and highlight the narratives that had the widest impact on study men in terms of social capital loss. I address similarities in patterns of social capital loss across microsystems. Finally, I review how findings from this dissertation relate to previous studies of Black sexual minority men across microsystems and provide suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### **OUT IN THE SILENCE: HETEROSEXISM, RACISM, AND THE DOUBLE CONTAIMENT OF BLACK SEXUAL MINORITY MEN**

Somers (1994) describes master narratives as the “epic dramas of our time” (p. 623) that frame interactions within microsystems. In this chapter, I provide a historical analysis of the master narratives addressing sexuality and race in Western—and more specifically, American—society. Each of these narratives simultaneously justifies and perpetuates a hierarchy, in which one group is considered superior to another. In the sexual hierarchy, heterosexual people are superior to homosexual people. In the racial hierarchy, White Americans are superior to Black Americans. Importantly for this study, these master narratives frame public narratives about homosexuality<sup>10</sup> upon which gatekeepers draw in reacting to sexual minority adolescents and shaping their access to social capital.

I begin by discussing the emergence of the heterosexual-homosexual binary—the key master narrative addressing sexual minorities in American society. This narrative emerged through two means: first, through the influence of Platonic thought in Western Christianity that considers same-sex sexual activity as against the natural order; and second, through the process of nationalism in American society that established heterosexuality as normal sexuality. Additionally, I discuss master narratives of race. I argue that the master narrative of sexualized racism has impacted Black sexual minority men uniquely by rendering them invisible both within Black and LGBT communities.

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<sup>10</sup> They frame public narratives about Black Americans as well, but discussing these public narratives about race falls outside the scope of this study.

## Moving toward a Heterosexual-Homosexual Binary

*Divinity Ethic.* A number of factors in the history of Western Christianity led to the belief that same-sex sexual activity falls outside the natural order. These include: closed monotheism; the influence of Platonic dualism in Christian thought; and the rise of Christianity to cultural power during the early centuries of the Common Era. Historically, some Christians held that no alternative pathways to accessing the divine existed outside a very particular conception of the natural order. Brown Douglas (2005) calls this belief *closed monotheism*. In this worldview, Western Christians set up a strict dualism between believers (who fell within their conception of the natural order) and non-believers (who fell outside). The strict dualism of closed monotheism lends itself to antagonism, as Brown Douglas (2005) explains:

[Closed monotheism] projects a polarized society and cosmos. In so doing, it fosters divisions between Christians and just about everybody else. It creates opposition, us versus them relationships. Non-Christians are seen as at best godless and at worst evil. The closed nature of Christian monotheism precludes an appreciation for religio-cultural difference (p. 14).

It was into the framework of closed monotheism that Platonic dualism was adopted by many early Christians. Both operate on dualisms<sup>11</sup>. Closed monotheism creates a dualistic “us versus them” distinction between Christians (those within the natural order) and non-Christians (those outside). Platonic dualism operates on a dualism between the *world of the forms* and the *world of the particulars*. The *world of the forms* is unchangeable and can only be ascertained through reasoning. The *world of the particulars* includes the material world in which humans live (including human embodiment and sexuality). The unchanging world of the forms is superior to the changing world of the particulars.

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<sup>11</sup> Dualisms create oppositional relationships between two categories with one being of more value than the other.

According to Platonic dualism, the duty of the humans is to access true knowledge by focusing one's attention of the world of the forms while transcending the world of the particulars. This involves escaping sexual passion in order to live a life of the mind.

From Platonic dualism, Western Christians adopted the idea that divinity is associated with the mind (the world of the forms) and human bodies and sexuality are associated with the material world (the world of the particulars)<sup>12</sup>. As a result, many early Christians devalued sexuality. Augustine is most responsible for advancing Platonic dualism in early Christian thought<sup>13</sup>. He held that the body (with its sexual passion) is always to be subjugated to the soul (with its rationality). The only way to prevent oneself from being overcome by sexual passion is to engage in sexual activity only for the purpose of procreation. Procreation is an acceptable form of sexuality for two reasons. It allows men to achieve a sense of immortality through the production of offspring. In this way, procreative sexual activity brings men closer to the divine. Second, only procreative sex contributes to the common good of society through the production of a new generation. Valuing procreative sex alone placed sexual minority people at a particular disadvantage, however. Because same-sex sexual activity cannot be procreative, sexual minorities were placed outside the natural order if they chose to act on their sexual orientation (Fone 2001).

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<sup>12</sup> Early Christians were also influenced by Stoic thought. From Stoicism, Christians adopted the concept of *Apatheia* (bodily denial in order to live a life of the mind). Stoics did not devalue the natural world, as did Platonists. Nevertheless, they held a very strict view of the natural order (outside of which sexual passion fell). According to Stoic thought, life should lived in strict adherence to the natural order (i.e. from sexual passion) and should be governed by reason. Stocisim was similar in effect to Platonic dualism in that it devalued sexuality (Brown Douglas 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Other Christian leaders may have been even more extreme in their adoption of Platonic dualism, but Augustine had greater influence than any other Christian leader in advancing a narrative of procreative sexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality (Brown Douglas 2005).

The dualism promoted by Platonic thought also mapped onto the believer/non-believer dualism of closed monotheism (Brown Douglas 2005). True Christians were characterized by lives free from sexual passion or excess. Non-believers, on the other hand, experienced and gave into their sexual desires. Nevertheless, this intersection of Platonic dualism and closed monotheism was not used to subjugate people until Christians rose to a position of power within Western society. This occurred with the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century CE (Brown Douglas 2005). Until this point, Christians existed as a persecuted minority group within the Roman Empire. Although monotheistic, they advocated non-violence and tolerance towards all people. Constantine's conversion, however, melded closet monotheism and Platonic dualism with the power of the state, ushering in the era of Christendom. Unlike the religion of Christianity, Christendom was a religio-political force that held power in the West until the Enlightenment<sup>14</sup>. Brown Douglas (2005) refers the form of Christianity that combines closed monotheism, Platonic dualism, and the power of the state as *Platonized Christianity*.

In its elevated position, the church used sexuality as a tool for power (Foucault 1978). The church regulated sexuality by developing and encoding in law a master narrative that procreative sexuality was the only acceptable form of sexuality<sup>15</sup>. Sexuality also provided a means by which church leaders could categorize two classes of people: those who were driven by sexual passions and those who were not (Brown Douglas

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<sup>14</sup> And in some Western societies (such as the United States) until much later

<sup>15</sup> This state-enforced narrative was hegemonic in that it influenced people's view of their own body and sexuality, even apart from their fear of punishment. As Gordon states: "The power exerted by a legal regime consists less in the force that it can bring to bear against violators of its rules than in its capacity to persuade that the world described in its image and categories is the only attainable world" (1984, p. 109). As a result of these narratives, sexual minority people may not have had as much self-awareness or their own sexuality.

2005). These leaders combined both religious and community-based narratives that portrayed sexually driven people as both violating the natural order and threatening the common good. People who experienced and gave into sexual desires (i.e. engaged in non-procreative sex) were viewed as inferior<sup>16</sup> and were demonized<sup>17</sup>. In the era of Christendom, church-state leaders used these narratives to oppress those who challenged their theological framework and cultural power (Brown Douglas 2005). According to their logic, because these challengers were tainted by sexual passion—and thus belonged to the category of non-believers—church leaders were right to subjugate them<sup>18</sup>. Throughout the first millennia of the Western church, Jewish communities received the brunt of these narratives and their harmful effects. They were seen as the greatest threat to Christendom, as they offered a competing system of monotheistic belief<sup>19</sup>.

Another group to whom church-state leaders applied these narratives were people who engaged in same-sex sexual activity. They focused primarily on sexual minority men<sup>20</sup>. Sexual minority men were seen as both being controlled by sexual passion and as challenging the God-ordained gender hierarchy. Fone (2001) and others document the oppression of sexual minority men throughout the history of Western Christianity (also see Boswell 1980; Foucault 1978; Weeks 2002). Prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, men who engaged in same-sex activity were generally welcomed back into the church. This began

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<sup>16</sup> That is, they were treated with contempt (community ethic).

<sup>17</sup> That is, they were treated with disgust (divinity ethic).

<sup>18</sup> There was a close connection between doctrinal dissent and sexual infractions, even semantically. For instance, sodomy was first described as “buggery,” an Anglicized form of the French word, in an English law of 1533. The term was originally applied to doctrinal dissent in Europe but was later used in England to indicate a sexual sin (Fone 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Jews were synonymous with “sodomites”—i.e., those who engaged in non-procreative sex. Jews were accused of spreading syphilis, engaging in orgies that mocked Christian rituals, and posing a sexual danger to Christian children (Fone 2001)

<sup>20</sup> Although the sexual orientation of these men was not understood, and no identity label existed for them (other than sodomite, which had the broader meaning of one who engaged in non-procreative sex) (Fone 2001)

to change with the Council of Nablus (1120). Taking place during the violent and male-dominated Crusades, the Council declared that repeat offenders of homosexual acts were to be expelled from the kingdom of Jerusalem or executed (Fone 2001)<sup>21</sup>. Yet they were seen as men who chose to engage in same-sex sexuality activity, and not as homosexuals—i.e., men who were oriented to members of the same sex. Severe penalties continued for sexual minority men through the early twentieth century—at the hands of both church and state leaders—yet little evidence of homosexual identity emerged<sup>22</sup>.

*Community Ethic and Heterosexism.* Not until recent history has homosexuality been considered an inherent part of one's personhood (Foucault 1978; Weeks 2002). This process took place in separate, but interconnected, ways across Western societies. The concept of heterosexuality arose during the process of nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, the American state slowly began to define the category of homosexual through government actions that discriminated against sexual minorities based on their sexual orientation (Canady 2009). In this way, the heterosexual-homosexual binary emerged as the master narrative framing sexual minority people in American society.

Hegemonic masculinity has played a central role in shaping narratives about sexual minority people in American society. Connell (1987) bases her theory of hegemonic masculinity on Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony. Hegemony involves

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<sup>21</sup> This reaction appears to combine concern with masculinity with a divinity ethic about the natural order, in which disgust leads to expulsion.

<sup>22</sup> This point is debated in the historical literature. Scholars such as Boswell (1980) hold that at various points in Medieval history, some communities recognized sexual minority people as having a distinct identity category. Others believe that recognizing this identity category was a more gradual process. In different societies and at different times, societies came closer to identifying some women and men as having an innate sexual orientation towards people of the same sex. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, effeminate men came to be seen as a class of people and were persecuted in Holland and England. Still these distinctions were based more on gender than sexual orientation (Fone 2001).



the way in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination in society. Historically, the ruling class in American society has been White, property-owning men. One way that these men have secured their social power is through promoting a cultural value of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell (1987) explains that masculinity is a social constructed. By constructing certain traits and practices as widely held cultural values, men in power are able to secure their elevated position within the social order. The exact content of hegemonic masculinity varies over time and across societies—that is, certain traits and practices may be valued in cultures but not others (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Two features of hegemonic masculinity that remain constant are patriarchy (the domination of men over women) and heteronormativity (the belief that opposite-sex intimacy is natural, while same-sex intimacy is not). In American society, another core component of hegemonic masculinity is Whiteness (the belief that White Americans are superior to racial minority groups) (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2001). Thus, hegemonic masculinity has served as a tool for men in power to justify their power of women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities throughout American history.

The development of hegemonic masculinity in the late nineteenth century cannot be separated from the rise of nationalism<sup>23</sup> during the same time period (Gellner 1983; Hobsawm 1985). In American nationalism at the turn of the century, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of White, non-immigrant<sup>24</sup>, middle-class men considered themselves the founders of and heirs to the American nation. At the foundation of this

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<sup>23</sup> Nationalism is “an ideology that professes a common history, shared culture, and rightful homeland, and often is marked by ethnocentrism where nationalists assert moral, cultural and social superiority over other nations and nationalisms” (Nagel 2003, p. 148).

<sup>24</sup> Many immigrants groups (e.g. Irish) now considered White were not at this point in time. When I refer to White in this section, I am referring specifically to White, Anglo-Saxons.

imagined community was the White family—a patriarchal unit, whose male head embodied a hegemonic form of masculinity<sup>25</sup> (Carter 2007). This family unit formed the boundaries of the American nation. Nationalist boundaries are a specialized form of the moral boundaries theorized by Durkheim (1895). Nagel (2003) explains: “The margins of nations—ethnic frontiers, gender frontiers, sexual frontiers, ethno-sexual frontiers—are all locations where rules about citizenship...are tested and contested” (p. 147).

Nationalist boundaries rely on the community ethic. Those who fit within nationalist boundaries are portrayed as contributing to the common good. Those who fall outside—including sexual and racial minorities, in American society—do not.

During the late nineteenth century, leaders of the imagined community of White, middle-class men appealed to nationalism in order to secure and maintain economic and social control of the state, during a time of economic and social upheaval<sup>26</sup>. Nationalist narratives were marked by anxiety. The future of White cultural dominance was not secure. As one prominent commentator of the time noted:

All our civilization hangs by a thread; the activity and force of the very few makes us what we are as a nation; and if, through degeneracy, the descendants of these few revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors, all our haughty civilization will be wiped away (Beard 1881, p. 97).

The rising influence of the medical profession influenced these narratives (Carter 2004; Foucault 1978). In particular, leaders of the imagined community highlighted the concept of *neurasthenia*—also called nervous exhaustion or simply nervousness.

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<sup>25</sup> Heteronormativity is key to its definition. Connell (1987) explains: “The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage. A key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual” (p. 186).

<sup>26</sup> These upheavals included Emancipation, industrialization, urbanization and the rise of wage labor, the Great Migration of Blacks and poor Whites to Northern cities, and the economic crises of the 1870s and 1890s (Carter 2007).

Neurasthenia reflected “refined White Americans’ sensitivity to the complex stimulations of modern life” (Carter 2007, p. 42). Middle-class White Americans tended towards nervousness because they held the most prominent place in modern American civilization, with all of its uncertainty. Nervousness only affected people who were born into a special and privileged in relation to national progress—i.e. middle-class, White Americans. The primary symptom of neurasthenia was sexual exhaustion, which put the literal reproduction of Whiteness at risk. Nervous men and women were represented as “incapable of conceiving a new generation of productive and powerful Anglo-American citizens” (Carter 2007, p. 43).

The narrative of sexual exhaustion shaped master narratives of sexuality for both privileged Whites and subordinate groups (working class Whites, Blacks, and immigrants) during the late nineteenth century. For privileged Whites, the narrative required a regimen of sexual self-control. Only procreative sexuality was framed as acceptable, as it promoted the cultural dominance of White Americans. All other forms of sexuality (including masturbation, intercourse with contraception and homosexual acts) were prohibited, as they wasted precious sexual energy (Carter 2007). As had been the case throughout the history of Western Christianity, sexual passion was looked down upon. Middle-class Whites who engaged in non-procreative sex failed to serve the common good of the imagined community, and were treated with contempt. As a foil to the expected sexual self-control among the White middle class, the dominant discourse of sexualities amongst subordinated groups (Blacks and various European immigrant

groups) focused on their lack of sexual constraint<sup>27</sup>. They could not be members of the imagined community because they did not have the capacity to control their sexuality as did middle-class, White people (Brown Douglas 1999, 2005; Carter 2007).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the social and economic situation of White, Anglo-Saxons had stabilized relative to the late nineteenth century (Ellis 1900). Through the rise of industrial capitalism, the imagined community established its dominance for the time being (Beckert 2003). Narratives about sexual exhaustion faded away. During this time, however, divorce rates among White Americans began to rise. Scholars and cultural commentators felt that something had gone seriously awry. The master narrative of sexuality turned to addressing the “misery of modern marriage” (Carter 2007, p. 74) amongst White Americans. Like sexual exhaustion, this narrative served to ensure the reproduction of the imagined community. Rather than prohibiting sexual passion, however, it encouraged the cultivation of sexual pleasure—so long as it occurred within the bounds of a patriarchal family structure. The new narrative explained that privileged White Americans, uniquely sensitive due to their level of civilization, had a “special capacity for romantic love and erotic satisfaction in reproductive wedlock” (Carter 2007, p. 74).

Through the narrative of romantic love (for civilized Whites), the concept of heterosexuality entered American culture. Heterosexuality was defined as the “erotic fascination between men and women who are otherwise constructed as opposites” (Carter 2007, p. 77; Katz 2007, Rich 1980). This was a distinct departure from earlier forms of mind-body dualism. Whereas in the past all sexual passion was

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<sup>27</sup> Poor Whites, Blacks and immigrants could not experience nervousness “because they lacked the physical, intellectual and moral sensitivity and self-discipline that modern [Whites] had evolved” (Beard 1881, p. 2).

seen as damaging to the life of the mind, now one form—heterosexual passion—was considered acceptable. Additionally, rather than merely a behavior that one engaged in, heterosexuality was considered a core part of one's being. Initially the narrative of heterosexuality applied only to White, Anglo-Saxons. Over time, however, the narrative was applied to all Americans. Heterosexuality thus emerged as the universal order (Carter 2007). Black and working class White people were expected to embody heterosexual passion, just as middle class White people were<sup>28</sup>. A heterosexual-homosexual binary was not solidified, however, until it was encoded through the power of the State. In collaboration with the emerging cultural narrative of heterosexuality, the state defined its binary opposite: homosexuality. Canady (2009) describes this process in *Straight State*:

Regulation changed what was regulated. The state did not simply encounter homosexual citizens, fully formed and waiting to be counted, classified, administered, or disciplined. This was not simply a matter of “pre-constituted groups” (Stevens 1999, 56) either coming into or being blocked from the public sphere. Rather the state's identification of certain sexual behaviors, gender traits, and emotional ties as grounds for exclusion (from entering the country, serving in the military, or collecting benefits) was a catalyst in the formation of homosexual identity. The state, in other words, did not merely implicate but also constituted homosexuality in the construction of a stratified citizenry (p. 4).

With the influence of dualistic thought, the narrative of a heterosexual-homosexual binary emerged in American society. In this “stratified citizenry” (Canady 2009, p. 4), heterosexual people were normal. Homosexual people—their polar opposites—were not.

In terms of a community-based narrative, homosexuals were outside the new “imagined community” of American society. Community members treated them with

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<sup>28</sup> Black women and men continued to be portrayed as abnormal for embodying an excessive amount of heterosexual passion (Hills-Collins 2004).

contempt (as the government treated them as second-class citizens). In addition, because of the common good of the “imagined community” was believed to rely on heterosexual reproduction, homosexuals were viewed as potential threats. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, a number of moral panics (Cohen 2002) arose that painted homosexuals as enemies of the state. For example, the Lavender Scare of the 1950s portrayed homosexuals as communist infiltrators (Johnson 2009); the “Save Our Children” campaign as corruptors of America’s youth (Bryant 1977; Robinson 2008); and the Religious Right as portends to the end of Christendom in Western society (Fejes 2008; Fetner 2008). Political and religious leaders capitalized on the emerging heterosexual-homosexual binary to reinforce community boundaries and to consolidate power<sup>29</sup>.

The development of sexual identity categories (heterosexual and homosexual) also changed religious-based narratives. Whereas Western Christianity had primarily attacked same-sex sexual acts as violating the natural order, now sexual minority people themselves were considered outside the natural order. In the previous framing, sexual minority people were encouraged to stop engaging in same-sex intimacy. In many cases, those who ceased were once again considered believers (Fone 2001). Today, sexual minority people—due to their abnormal bodies/sexuality—are considered to violate the natural order in their very essence, according to many religious-based narratives<sup>30</sup>. There

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<sup>29</sup> Moral panics (Cohen 2002) may be tied to the idea of narratives. Irvine (2008) highlights the role of public emotion in moral panics about sexuality. The rational public sphere is also emotion. Public emotion may be conceptualized as a constellation of salient narratives. These narratives are often based on the emotions of disgust (divinity ethic) and threat (community narrative). Moral entrepreneurs may play upon these emotions in promulgating narratives that will heighten public emotion and consolidate religious or community boundaries.

<sup>30</sup> This can be seen, for instance, in the way that Bible translations have changed over the past 100 years. A popular Bible translation at the beginning of the twentieth century (American Standard Version, 1901) translated two Greek words—*malakoi* and *arsenokotai*—that appear in 1 Corinthians 6:9 as “effeminate”

is no script for sexual minority people to follow. They can hide (i.e. stay closeted). But if their sexual identity is revealed, they might find themselves permanently expelled from their communities.

### **Sexualized Racism and Double Containment**

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand how narratives about homosexuality influence Black sexual minority men. Yet, in American history, narratives about sexuality and race cannot be separated in their influence on Black Americans. Both narratives have played an integral role in upholding hegemonic masculinity (the dominance of heterosexual, White men) in American society. It is important to understand how master narratives of race frame the lives Black sexual minority men, as they intersect with the heterosexual-homosexual binary. Similar to the binary which frames homosexual people as having less value than heterosexual people, racist narratives frame Black individuals as having less value than White individuals.

Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2001) offers the most comprehensive definition of structural racism and its relation to master narratives about race (which he refers to as “racial ideologies”). His framework grounds master narratives in a social structure that is characterized by racial hierarchy—i.e., a racialized social system. He defines racialized social systems as “societies that allocate differential economic, political, and even psychological rewards along, socially-constructed racial lines” (2001, p. 44). In the United States and many Western European nations, the social construction of “White” and “Black” races coincided with the Atlantic slave trade. Prior to the slave trade,

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and “abusers of themselves with mankind.” The latter referred to the action of same-sex sexuality at most, but not to sexual identity. By the mid twentieth-century, popular translations combined these words into identity categories such as “homosexuals” (The Living Bible, 1971) and “homosexual perverts” (Today’s English Version, 1966).

“White” had no meaning within the social system, and African people were identified by their respective people groups rather than by skin color (Hannaford 1996; Omi & Winant 1986, 1993). During the slave trade and after, powerful members of American society (the “imagined community” of White, Anglo-Saxons) created the social category of “Black” in order to benefit from the labor of African slaves and to define the boundaries of Whiteness.

In the United States, rationalizations of Black subordination began as soon as these racial categories were constructed. Master narratives about race reinforced the racial structure by justifying discrimination. One master narrative—sexualized racism—began early in American history and continues to affect Black sexual minority men in a unique way. Hills-Collins (2004) explains:

Black male bodies symbolize fear. Historical representations of Black men as beasts have spawned a set of controlling images that center of Black male bodies, namely, Black men as inherently violent, hyper-heterosexual, and in need of discipline (p. 158).

The view of Black individuals as hypersexual can be traced back to the early slave trade and its justification in Platonized Christianity (Brown Douglas 1999, 2005). Just as Christendom had demonized the sexuality of out-groups in the past (e.g. Jewish people), Westerners justified their subjugation of African people through narratives about their sexuality. In early American history, Black individuals were viewed as driven by sexual passion and thus unable to attain reason as were White individuals (Hills-Collins 2004). White Americans used this distinction to justify keeping Black Americans from the rights of citizenship and controlling them through chattel slavery (Brown Douglas 2005).

One force that led to the narrative of the hyper-heterosexuality of Black men was the economics of slavery. In order to generate more commodities for the capitalistic



slavery industry, Black reproduction was needed. Although White male slave owners fulfilled the male role in heterosexual biological reproduction by raping Black women, Black male slaves were compelled to “breed” with Black female slaves in order to produce offspring, thereby augmenting the property of slave owners (Zack 1997). The profit-driven “breeder” role reinforced the narrative of the hyper-heterosexuality of Black men (Crooms 1994, Jennings 1990). When Black reproduction was no longer valued, the narrative that Black men were hyper-heterosexual persisted. Instead of being used for profit, however, the narrative served to enforce racial segregation painting them as a dangerous threat to White women<sup>31</sup>. This controlling image of Black men as “dangerous” and “hyper-heterosexual” is in part used to justify the maintenance of structural inequality today<sup>32</sup>.

*The ‘Double Containment’ of Black Sexual Minority Men.* Hills-Collins (2004) theorizes that the portrayal of Black male sexuality as hyper-heterosexual renders Black sexual minority men invisible. She explains: “Racism and heterosexism both require a concept of sexual deviancy for meaning, yet the form that deviance takes within each system differs” (p. 110). For racism, the deviance is created by a normalized White heterosexuality that depends on a deviant Black heterosexuality to give it meaning<sup>33</sup>. For the heterosexual-homosexual binary—as previously discussed—the deviance is created

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<sup>31</sup> The racist narrative of Black male sexuality as dangerous has left an indelible imprint in the history of American injustice. The institution of lynching in the post-bellum South, for example, was justified by the construction of Black male heterosexuality as a violent threat to White women. The pervasive fear of Black men as rapists of White women was exploited to legitimate the slayings and to excuse White control and domination over Blacks generally. Fear of Black male heterosexuality has also impacted the law and legal system, resulting in gross deprivations of due process in criminal proceedings, vast disparities in punishment, and discriminatory laws prohibiting interracial marriage (Wacquant 1989), as well as the maintenance of racially-segregated neighborhoods (Wacquant 2001).

<sup>32</sup> In terms of Bonilla-Silva’s (1997) theory, the controlling image of Black men as dangerous and hyper-heterosexual—i.e. the master narrative of sexualized racism—justifies the maintenance of racially segregated ghettos and mass incarceration, among other aspects of today’s racialized social structure.

<sup>33</sup> The amount of heterosexual passion that is acceptable is ascertained in comparison to the hyper-heterosexuality of Black women and men.

by this very same normalized White heterosexuality that depends on a deviant homosexuality. Whereas the deviance associated with promiscuity (and, by implication, with Black women and men as a racial group) is thought to lie in an excess of heterosexual desire, the pathology of homosexuality resides in the absence of it<sup>34</sup>.

Together, these narratives assume heterosexual promiscuity and the impossibility of same-sex desire among Black men. If racism relies on assumptions of Black hyper-heterosexuality, then Black sexual practices that do not adhere to these assumptions challenge racism at its very core. Either Black men cannot be homosexual or those Black men who are homosexual are not “authentically” Black. The master narrative of sexualized racism effectively “Whitened” homosexuality (Hills Collins 2004). Black sexual minority men are *doubly contained* (Hills Collins 2004). They are considered neither fully Black nor fully gay.

Double containment has silenced Black sexual minority men in both LGBT and Black communities. In the mainstream (i.e., White, middle class) gay community, Black sexual minority men are invisible. Portrayed as hyper-heterosexual, they are outsiders at best and objects of fear at worst. Marlon Riggs (1989) and Joseph Beam (1986) describe Black men’s experiences of invisibility within predominantly White, gay communities:

“I pretended not to notice the absence of Black images in this new gay life, in bookstores, poster shops, film festivals, even my own fantasies. Something in Oz was amiss, but I tried not to notice. I was intent on my search for my reflection, love, affirmation, in eyes of blue, gray, green. Searching, I discovered something I didn’t expect, something decades of determined assimilation cannot blind me to. In this great, gay, Mecca, I was an invisible man. I had no shadow, no substance, no place, no history no reflection” (Riggs 1989).

“Visibility is survival...It is possible to read thoroughly two or three consecutive issues of the Advocate [a national biweekly gay

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<sup>34</sup> Sometimes framed as an excess of homosexual passion

newsmagazine] and never encounter, in the words or images, Black gay men... We ain't family. Very clearly, gay male means: White, middle-class, youthful, nautalized... there is no room for Black gay men within the confines of this gay pentagon" (Beam 1986, p. 17).

Study men echoed these frustrations. Carter recalls being made both invisible and hypervisible in White LGBT community spaces, because of his race. On his college campus, Carter's contributions to LGBT activism received less attention than those of White males (i.e. he was made invisible). When he did receive attention, it was often sexual. Based on the narrative of sexualized racism, White gay men applied a hypermasculine stereotype to Carter and "fetishized" him. (i.e., he was made hypervisible).

Like Carter, Xavier recalls being ignored in White, gay political circles when he brought up issues facing Black sexual minority men. He was often the only Black person at events and felt invisible. The White leaders at these events cared only about marriage, and not about the "life and death" events facing LGBT youth of color. To Xavier this felt like a "slap in the face":

They were tokenizing me. They wanted my energy, my ideas, but they didn't want to support me as an individual. I felt like I was getting lost in their mission, in this bigger picture of what they wanted to accomplish as an organization. I just didn't feel comfortable.

As an energetic advocate, Xavier was valued. As a *Black* gay man, his identity was erased. This invisibility led some study men to give up on the gay community entirely, at least for a time. Will recalls going through "a very dark period" when he was dealing with both rejection in the Black community (at home and in church) and within the gay community. He decided: "I'm not going to do anything with the LGBT community, because they don't want anything to do with me."

Black sexual minority men have not only been rendered invisible as *Black* men within the LGBT community, but also have been silenced as *gay* men in Black communities. No story reflects this phenomenon more clearly than that of Bayard Rustin. Bayard Rustin (who organized the 1963 March on Washington) deserves to be commemorated as one of the great leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, he is largely written out of Black—and American—history. D’Emilio (2003) explains that the censure of Rustin from historical accounts may be due to the fact that he was also openly gay and advocated for the rights of gay men and lesbians, alongside his fight for racial equality.

The silencing of men like Bayard Rustin within the Black community may be due to a tacit acceptance of the narrative of sexualized racism—at least the part that precludes the possibility of an authentically Black men being gay. Or it may be due to a *politics of respectability*—a response, as I discuss in Chapter 3, to the narrative of hypersexuality leveled against Black Americans. Either way, the phenomenon of silencing has largely suppressed the open acknowledgment of sexual minority men within Black communities—at least until recently. In the next chapter, I consider how the master narratives of the homosexual-heterosexual binary and racism (including sexualized racism) have intersected to create public narratives about homosexuality in Black communities.

## CHAPTER 3:

### BREAKING THE SILENCE: PUBLIC NARRATIVES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

*And that the ascription of any singular political or moral ideology to African-Americans as a population is a fallacious idea and a surefire losing strategy<sup>35</sup>.*

--Yoruba Richen, *The New Black*

There was a day when homosexuality was rarely spoken about in Black communities. Intimacy between two men was “the love that dares not speak its name” (Douglas 1984, p. 1). That day is over. Although the discussion of LGBT issues has steadily unfolded over the past decades, President Obama opened the floodgates of discussion with his support of marriage equality in May 2012. America’s first Black president, Obama has also advocated for LGBT rights more than any past executive<sup>36</sup>. Poignantly, Obama broke national silence in 2013 as the first President to mention lesbian and gay Americans by name in a State of the Union Address:

Our generation's task is to carry on what was begun at Seneca Falls, Selma and Stonewall <sup>37</sup>...Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law—for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Richen, Y. (2013, October 11). Civil rights for all: The making of the “New Black”. Believe Out Loud. Retrieved from <http://believeoutloud.com/latest/civil-rights-all-making-new-black>.

<sup>36</sup> During his tenure as President, Obama has signed the first federal hate crimes legislation protecting sexual minority people (The Matthew Shepherd and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act) (2009), repealed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (2010), ended the federal legal defense of the Defense of Marriage Act (2011), and banned discrimination against LGBT employees of companies receiving federal contracts (2014), amongst other achievements (White House 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Symbolic centers in the movements for women's rights, Black American’s rights and LGBT American’s rights, respectively

<sup>38</sup> Obama, President B. (2013, January 21). Inaugural address by President Barack Obama. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>.

No longer characterized by silence, the discussion of homosexuality in Black communities has been diverse and deeply polarizing. While Black political leaders push for LGBT civil rights, some people in the Black community are skeptical. Like many Americans, they believe that homosexuality is a sin, a detriment to the good of the Black community, or unworthy of being compared to civil rights for racial minority people. In this chapter, I focus on these diverse, public narratives. Somers (1994) describes public narratives as “narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (p. 628), but that are beholden to master narratives. In the previous chapter, I discussed the master narrative of the heterosexual-homosexual binary (that heterosexuality is normal/moral sexuality and homosexuality is abnormal/immoral sexuality). It is hegemonic in that public narratives about homosexuality must reference it by either accepting or rejecting its premises. Throughout the chapter, I refer to public narratives that accept the binary simply as *narratives*. I refer to narratives that reject heterosexism as *counternarratives*.

I focus on public narratives within Black communities not only because they directly affect the lives of Black sexual minority men via gatekeeper narratives, but also because few studies have focused on the diversity of narratives about homosexuality within Black communities. Previous studies have tended to offer explanations for the divergence in approval of homosexuality between Black and White communities. These studies find that although Black Americans are less likely to approve of homosexuality morally and to support same-sex marriage (Whitley, Childs & Collins 2011), they are more likely to support non-discrimination legislation protecting sexual minority people (Lewis 2003). Lemelle and Battle (2004) find that religious beliefs are the primary reason

why some Black women do not approve of homosexuality while adherence to hegemonic masculinity is the primary that some Black men do not approve.

This chapter expands on these findings by identifying specific narratives about homosexuality held by people within Black communities. To identify these narratives, I relied on a combination of previous literature and a content analysis of sermons, writings and social media commentary. From this analysis, I present quotations that exemplify each narrative included in this chapter. (A more detailed explanation of my methodology can be found in Appendix A.) The narratives presented in this chapter are not exhaustive and most of them are not unique to Black communities. I note throughout the chapter where public narratives have been influenced by historical experiences of racism in American society.

Like master narratives, public narratives influence the lives of Black sexual minority men in powerful ways. Gatekeepers (i.e. teachers, classmates, parents and religious leaders) draw upon public narratives in developing their own views about homosexuality. If they accept a public narrative that frames homosexuality as a sin or a detriment to the community good, they may react poorly when a young man comes out to them. Intentionally or not, this negative reaction may cause the young man to lose access to social capital. In this chapter, I discuss three sets of public narratives that are present within Black communities: religious-based narratives and counternarratives; community-based narratives and counternarratives; and individual rights-based counternarratives<sup>39</sup>.

### **Religious Narratives**

Religious narratives are based on a divinity ethic (discussed in Appendix B) and involve justifying the natural order. The natural order explains the way that the world

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<sup>39</sup> For a description of how I conceptualized this set of narratives, see Appendix A.

works. It varies from society to society—i.e., it is socially constructed. In Chapter 2, I discussed the way in which Platonized Christianity constructs same-sex sexual activity as outside the natural order. With the development of a heterosexual-homosexual binary in American society, sexual minority people likewise are considered outside the natural order. Psychologists explain that violations of the natural order are met with sociomoral disgust (Haidt 2001; Shweder 1999). People who experience disgust may expel violators of the natural order (e.g. sexual minority people) from their presence. For instance, leaders of a religious institution may force a man out of the church when he reveals that he is gay.

Many Black religious communities in the United States have adopted Platonized Christianity. Platonized Christianity is characterized by an oppositional, hierarchical relationship between the mind and the body. Humans connect to God through the mind, and bodies (sexuality, in particular) were to be distrusted. African religions, prior to the period of chattel slavery, did not resemble the dualism of Platonized Christianity. Humans connect to the divine through bodily expression. All bodies are divine, and thus all people are spiritually equal (Brown Douglas 1999).

Whereas Western societies reacted harshly to people that engaged in same-sex activity (Fone 2001), historical literature suggests that reactions were milder and more nuanced in African communities (Constantine-Simms 2001). While these communities placed a high value on procreation<sup>40</sup>, some found a place for sexual minorities within their concept of the natural order (Epprecht 2008). They created special roles for sexual minorities, and developed benign explanations of why some people were sexually oriented towards members of the same sex (e.g. they had the spirit of a female ancestor)

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<sup>40</sup> As did most traditional societies in world history



(Hoad 2007; Murray & Rosceo 2008). Furthermore, African societies that did punish sexual minorities rarely used the extreme measures that were commonplace in Western society. These reactions were typically restorative, rather than punitive (Epprecht 2008)<sup>41</sup>.

Platonized Christianity entered Black communities in the United States during the First and Second Great Awakening (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). As opposed to previous Anglican missionaries, revival evangelists emphasized the equality of all believers (Brown Douglas 2005)<sup>42</sup>. Black communities joined Evangelical congregations and denominations in large numbers. Some popular thought holds that Black Americans are inherently more Christian than are other Americans. Brown Douglas (2005), however, explains that Black communities were strategic in their appropriation of Christian traditions and theology. That Black communities would have adopted Platonized Christianity was not at all obvious. It went against the traditional African view of the body as sacred. Because Black bodies had been viewed as violating the natural order (due to the racist narrative of Black hypersexuality), strict adherence to a dualistic view of the mind and body offered Black Americans the opportunity to show they were equal to their White oppressors.

As many Western Christians had for centuries, newly converted Black Christians would deny their bodies. In doing so, they would demonstrate that the sexualized stereotypes leveled against them were false. Because these stereotypes had been integral in justifying political oppression, overcoming them might also offer Black communities

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<sup>41</sup> That is, they focused on including sexual minority people back into the community, rather than expelling them.

<sup>42</sup> The extent to which these White religious leaders actually practiced racial equality varied greatly (Brown-Douglas 2005).

the opportunity for equal citizenship. Some scholars refer to this strategic silencing of sexuality in Black communities as a *politics of respectability*<sup>43</sup> (e.g. Hills Collins 2004, West 1993).

### Narratives of Disgust

The appropriation of Platonized Christianity also meant that Black communities tended to view procreative sex as the only legitimate form of sexual expression (Brown Douglas 2005). Anybody who engaged in non-procreative sexual activity (including same-sex sexual activity) violated the natural order. Some Black religious leaders employ narratives of disgust towards homosexuality today. These narratives frame sexual minority peoples as outside the natural order (i.e. “It’s Not Natural”) although some narratives portray the contamination of homosexuality as temporary (Demon Possession, “You Can Change”) or partial (“Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin”). It should be noted that none of these narratives are unique to Black communities, but are common within American Christianity.

One religious narrative—“It’s Not Natural”—makes a clear connection between the natural order and feelings of disgust at violations of this order. God designed male and female as complementary partners for sexual union. Rev. Willie Wilson (a Baptist pastor from Washington, DC) echoes many religious leaders in emphasizing that “God made them male and female... there is something unique to man and unique to woman and it takes those two things to complement each other<sup>44</sup>.” For two men or two women to join in sexual union violates this natural order. Rev. Wilson goes on: “It isn’t natural.

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<sup>43</sup> The “politics of respectability” will be discussed as a community-based narrative, even though it has its roots in a religious narrative of mind-body dualism (where White individuals had access to the life of the mind and Black individuals did not).

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, W. (2005, July). You’ve got to fight to be free. In M.A. Gibson, J. Alexander & D.T. Meem (eds.), *Finding Out: An introduction to LGBT studies* (p. 173). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Any time somebody got to slap some grease on your behind, and stick something in you, it's something wrong with that. Your butt isn't made for that<sup>45</sup>.” Some religious leaders frame the “It’s Not Natural” narrative with even greater theological significance. Bishop Eddie Long (a Baptist pastor from Atlanta) connects the physical act of sex with God’s covenant with his followers. Sex between two males is not only unnatural, but also un-Christian:

God brings himself back to himself through covenant through blood. When the ordained process of God (marriage), when a virgin man has sex with a virgin woman, there is blood shed on his penis which represents covenant and the redemptive grace of God. That’s the reason why men, you are circumcised. So that every time you pull out your male organ and wants to go in the wrong direction, you can see that you are not in covenant and anything that goes against the covenant is Anti-Christ<sup>46</sup>.

The appropriate reaction for such violations is visceral disgust<sup>47</sup>. Thabiti Anyabwile (a Baptist pastor from Washington, DC) recalls sitting in a meeting with community leaders who approved of same-sex relationships. He tried to provide biblical evidence to support his own view that these relationships are against God’s design (natural order), yet his efforts failed. He suggests that Christians instead direct conversations toward the disgust that people should naturally feel when thinking about same-sex relationships and marriage:

[We need to] return the discussion to sexual behavior in all its yuckiest gag-inducing truth... We are talking about one man inserting the male organ used to create life into the part of another man used to excrete waste... That sense of moral outrage you’re now likely feeling—that gut-wrenching, jaw-clenching, hand-over-your-mouth, “I feel dirty” moral outrage is the gag reflex. Your moral sensibilities have been provoked—and rightly so. That reflex triggered by an accurate description of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Long, Bishop E.L. (2003, January). *God is after Himself* [ministry tape]. Lithonia, GA: Eddie L. Long Ministries.

<sup>47</sup> Psychological studies show that many people have visceral (bodily) reactions of disgust when presented with the topic of homosexuality (Inbar et al. 2009; Inbar, Pizarro and Bloom 2012).

homosexual behavior will be the beginning of the recovery of moral sense and sensibility when it comes to the so-called “gay marriage” debate<sup>48</sup>.

Some pastors holding the “It’s Not Natural” narrative extend the disgust that they feel towards same-sex sexual activity towards sexual minority people in general. These pastors suggest that sexual minority people should be expelled from the church community. According to disgust psychology, an object that is contaminated cannot be mixed with something sacred—in this case, the sacred space of the church (Beck 2011; Haidt 2012). A Payton Sr. (a Pentecostal pastor from Phoenix) reminds his congregants that “God will break down anything in his sanctuary is not like him.” Sexual minority people should thus “not be allowed in the house of the living God<sup>49</sup>.”

The “It’s Not Natural” narrative holds that sexual minority people are fully contaminated. Furthermore, no positive script is provided for people to follow. Once their sexual identity is disclosed, sexual minority are irreversibly stigmatized<sup>50</sup> (Goffman 1963). Two religious narratives—Demon Possession and “You Can Change”—are also based in disgust psychology (viewing homosexuality as a violation of the natural order). These narratives, however, provide some script for sexual minority people to remove the contaminating element of homosexuality and thus to shed themselves of stigma.

*Demon Possession.* Demon possession, when applied by American religious leaders to sexual minority people, differs from spirit possession as described in anthropological literature (Lewis 2003; Boddy 1994). Whereas spirit possession serves a

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<sup>48</sup> Anybwire, T. (2013, August 19). The importance of your gag reflex when discussing homosexuality and gay marriage. *The Gospel Coalition*. Retrieved from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabitianyabwire/2013/08/19/the-importance-of-your-gag-reflex-when-discussing-homosexuality-and-gay-marriage/>.

<sup>49</sup> Payton Sr., A. (2011, January 29). Homosexuality in the house of God. Retrieved from <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v207586676QyqgwJ>.

<sup>50</sup> Goffman describes stigma as an attribute that is “deeply discrediting” and that transforms the target “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman 1963, p. 3).

positive social function, demon possession is another way to talk about sexual minority people as objects of disgust (Tinney 1977). Bert Farias<sup>51</sup> (a Pentecostal minister from New England) combines the demon possession narrative with disgust psychology.

Homosexuality is a “putrid-smelling demon<sup>52</sup>” whose presence induces vomiting. Dwight McKissic (a Southern Baptist pastor from Texas) ties homosexuality to the Anti-Christ, considered by some Christians to be the ultimate personification of evil. He explains that the Anti-Christ “will not desire women”—perhaps a “subtle way of suggesting that the Anti-Christ would be a homosexual<sup>53</sup>.”

Messages such as these suggest that the demon possession narrative may put sexual minority people in even greater danger than the “It’s Not Natural” narrative. If sexual minority people are seen to be manifestations of evil, then any kind of atrocity might be committed against them (Pagels 2011). Yet, the demon possession narrative offers a script that the former does not: deliverance. Sexual minority people may be delivered from the demon of homosexuality. The deliverance of a gay man (Andrew Caldwell) at the 2014 COGIC National Convention made headlines. In front of thousands of religious adherents Caldwell exclaimed: “I’m not gay no more. I’m delivered. I don’t like men no more I like women. I will not carry a purse. I will not put on makeup<sup>54</sup>. I will

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<sup>51</sup> Unlike other religious leaders mentioned in this chapter, Farias is White. Nevertheless dedicated much of his career to ministry in West Africa and today regularly addresses Black churches in the United States. Preachers like Farias have great influence on shaping public narratives about homosexuality within Black religious communities, which is why I chose one example from a White religious leader. Often religious-based narratives about homosexuality promulgated in Black churches draw directly from predominantly White Christian communities.

<sup>52</sup> Farias, B. (2014, July 22). The raw naked truth about homosexuality. *Charisma News*. Retrieved from <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/the-flaming-herald/44730-the-raw-naked-truth-about-homosexuality>.

<sup>53</sup> McKissic, D. (2014, Feb. 18). Saints in Sodom: How are God’s people to live in an America that is increasingly accepting of homosexuality? Retrieved from <http://blackchristiannews.com/2014/02/saints-in-sodom-how-are-gods-people-to-live-in-an-america-that-is-increasingly-accepting-of-homosexuality/>.

<sup>54</sup> Caldwell’s testimony, similar to others, illustrates that signs of demonic possession include not only same-sex desire but also deviation from the norms of hegemonic masculinity.

love a woman<sup>55</sup>.”

Caldwell’s deliverance attracted the cheers of hundreds. Rid of both contamination and stigma, Caldwell could move forward as a member of the religious community<sup>56</sup>. There was one problem, however. Caldwell was still gay. Hounded by the media, Caldwell later confessed that he had not been truly delivered<sup>57</sup>. Although more public than typical, Caldwell’s story bears similarity to many deliverance testimonies. A person is delivered from homosexuality. Their stigma may be reduced for a period of time. But in many cases, some sign of homosexuality presents itself again (e.g. a same sex encounter is brought to light, ongoing same-sex attraction is confessed). The sexual minority person is then re-stigmatized (Stanford 2013).

*You can Change*. Another narrative—“You can Change”—frames homosexuality not as the result of demon possession, but either as a spiritual or psychological sickness. James Meeks (a Baptist minister from Chicago, who was appointed the chairman of the Illinois State Board of Education) calls homosexuality “an evil sickness<sup>58</sup>.” Earl Carter (superintendent of the Church of God in Christ denomination) declares that he does not hate gays<sup>59</sup> but that he “is like the doctor who fights the disease”: “My gospel is like

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<sup>55</sup> Healey, C. (2014, November 11). Man declares he’s not gay anymore in viral video from church convocation. *The Grio*. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/11/10/man-delivered-homosexuality-video/>.

<sup>56</sup> Although it is not clear how many people would continue to stigmatize those who were “possessed” at some point in the past, but now claimed to be delivered

<sup>57</sup> Callahan, Y. (2015, February 28). Andrew Caldwell says he still desires men. *The Root*. Retrieved from [http://www.theroot.com/blogs/the\\_grapevine/2015/02/andrew\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_gay\\_no\\_more\\_caldwell\\_says\\_he\\_s\\_till\\_desires\\_men.html](http://www.theroot.com/blogs/the_grapevine/2015/02/andrew_i_m_not_gay_no_more_caldwell_says_he_s_till_desires_men.html).

<sup>58</sup> Dizikes, C., Pearson, R. & Ruthhart, B. (2015, March 2015). Meeks pulls about-face, backs Emanuel. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-mayoral-campaign-endorsement-events-met-20150320-story.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Later in the speech, however, Carter links his “homosexuality as disease” narrative to his physical revulsion towards homosexual acts.

chemotherapy. We try to get to the disease<sup>60</sup>.” The “disease” of homosexuality is framed either as spiritual or psychological. Creflo Dollar (a Pentecostal minister from Atlanta) frames homosexuality as a spiritual ailment, blaming it on a generational curse. This curse comes because of some iniquity committed by the gay person’s ancestor: “The Bible says a causeless curse shall not come<sup>61</sup>.” For removing the generational curse, Dollar suggests the script of being “born again” in Jesus Christ:

However, nothing will happen until we take the first step, which is to become a born-again Christian. Jesus shed His precious blood so that we may be born again. He suffered great torment and allowed Himself to be brutally killed so that we can be free from sin’s control. We no longer have to live a life dominated by sin. When we make Jesus our Lord and Savior, we switch families and take on the nature of God instead of the devil’s nature<sup>62</sup>.

Being born again means giving up homosexuality in order to be brought back in alignment with the natural order—heterosexuality<sup>63</sup>. Other religious leaders believe that this re-alignment occurs through psychological counseling—i.e., reparative therapy. According to reparative therapy, heterosexuality is developmentally normal sexuality. If all goes well during a child’s development, he will develop a heterosexual orientation (APA 2009). If any of a number of things goes wrong—i.e., the child has a distant father, an overbearing mother, or is sexually abused—the child may instead develop a homosexual orientation (Nicolosi 1997).

Reparative therapy involves addressing these developmental issues, so that a sexual minority person may “repair” their broken sexuality (i.e. change from a

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<sup>60</sup> Carter, E. (2014, November 9). Speech at 2014 COGIC Convention. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh0r7C63\\_J0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh0r7C63_J0).

<sup>61</sup> Proverbs 26:2 (English Standard Version)

<sup>62</sup> Dollar, C. (2011, January). Was I born this way? Retrieved from <http://change.creflodollarministries.org/site/1008/wasibornthisway.aspx>.

<sup>63</sup>Those who hold the “You Can Change” narrative acknowledge that the effort to overcome homosexual attraction may take a very long time (in some cases, a person’s entire lifetime). This is in contrast to the “Demon Possession” narrative which tends to emphasize immediate deliverance.

homosexuality to a heterosexual orientation) (APA 2009, Nicolosi 1997). Once a common approach to treating homosexuality, reparative therapy now exists almost exclusively within religious sub-communities (Baldock 2014). D.L Foster's Overcomers Network, for instance, offers "freedom from homosexuality and all other forms of sexual immorality<sup>64</sup>" through trust in Jesus Christ. Specifically, the organization focuses on teaching, peer empowerment and fellowship help women and men to achieve their "heterosexual potential." Nevertheless, research finds that such sexual orientation rarely, if ever, occurs (ASA 2009; Bradshaw et al. 2015). As a result, the "You Can Change" narrative may result in frustration for both gatekeepers and sexual minority men when change does not happen as expected.

*Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin.* Like the above narratives, the "Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin" narrative is based in the disgust that people feel toward same-sex sexuality as a violation of the natural order. Sexual minority people in this narrative are framed as partially contaminated. Their contaminated sexuality elicits disgust (i.e. hate the sin), while the rest of their personhood is not contaminated and is deserving of love (i.e. love the sinner). Scholars debate as to whether it is possible to experience disgust towards someone's sexuality, while still maintaining a close relationship with them. Rosik and colleagues (2007) believe that it is possible, while Beck (2011) believes that disgust creates binary judgments that may make it difficult to accept sexual minority people fully while hating their sexuality. This may be especially the case now that homosexuality is

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<sup>64</sup> Foster, D.L. (2014). About the Overcomers Network. Retrieved from <http://www.overcomersnetwork.org/about-us.html>.



considered inherent to personhood of sexual minority people rather than merely a behavior in which they choose to engage<sup>65</sup>.

Some religious leaders voice a “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin” narrative. Dr. Raymond Gordon (a Baptist pastor from Williamston, New Jersey) exhorts that “we are to love everyone, but we are not to stand in unison with everyone<sup>66</sup>.” Specifically, Christians are not to stand in unison with homosexuals. Edward Johnson (a COGIC pastor from South Carolina) adds that the only place that “gays, lesbians and whoremongers belong in ‘God’s church’ is in the pews.” He urges Christians that they are to “love the sinner and hate the sin—to endorse anything else is to be complicit<sup>67</sup>.” For these religious leaders, loving the sinner and hating their sin means placing limits on sexual minority people within religious communities and perhaps loving them at a distance. While not quite the forceful expulsion that some leaders attach to the “It’s Not Natural” narrative, this distancing may still negatively impact sexual minority people in churches and religious homes. They may slowly lose access to social capital if relationships grow cold when they come out.

#### Narratives that Aid Disgust

Two narratives common in Evangelical Christianity —inerrancy and “It’s the End of the World”—do not directly address sexual minority people, but play a role in keeping narratives of disgust in place.

*Inerrancy.* Some Black Christians base their rejection of homosexuality on an inerrant view of the Bible. Inerrancy holds that the Bible is without error in regards to its

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<sup>65</sup> As it had been viewed in previous historical eras

<sup>66</sup> Gordon, Dr. R. (2013, June 30). Sermon. Retrieved from <http://stmatthews.sermon.net/8624506>.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson Sr., E.L. (2014, December 1). Re: The repudiation of Superintendent Earl Carter’s Message at the 2014 Holy Convocation. Retrieved from <http://www.cogiconfire.com/414326153/2504927/posting/>.

facts and moral teachings (Grudem 1994). Specific scriptures that are used to condemn homosexuality include: Genesis 19 (in which God is believed to have destroyed a city because of its inhabitant's homosexuality); Leviticus 18 (which calls male same-sex relations an "abomination"); Romans 1 (which calls same-sex relations "unnatural"); 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 9 (which in some translations say that homosexuals "will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven"<sup>68</sup>).

One community member explains what some Christians hold to be the Biblical view of homosexuality—that is, the view that is upheld by Biblical inerrancy. In his mind, the Bible leaves no doubt that homosexuality is wrong:

Condemnation of homosexuality as an abomination is not a matter of interpretation or misinterpretation—the bible made it very explicit that homosexuality is not just a sin, but the worst sin that humans can make. There is no way you can simply ignore something so crystal clear and explicit as the condemnation of homosexuality as an abomination. There's just no way<sup>69</sup>!

Religious scholars explain that homophobia in Black churches is often tied to such interpretations of scripture (Ward 2005). Douglas (1999) believes that "Scripture is often the cornerstone of homophobia in the black community" (p. 90).

Today, Black Protestants are slightly more likely to uphold biblical inerrancy than are other religious groups<sup>70</sup>. This may in part explain why Black Americans are also slightly less likely to support same-sex relationships (see Constantine-Sims 2001, Jenkins

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<sup>68</sup> Which is taken by many Christians to mean that gay people will go to hell

<sup>69</sup> S.S. [pseudonym]. (2012, July 3). Re: AME Church denies withdrawing support from Obama [weblog comment]. Retrieved from: <http://thegrio.com/2012/07/03/ame-church-denies-withdrawing-support-for-obama/>.

<sup>70</sup> 62 percent of Black Protestants report holding an inerrant view of the Bible versus 59 percent of White Evangelical Protestants (Sahgal & Smith 2009)

et al. 2007)<sup>71</sup>. The use of Scripture to condemn homosexuality is not necessary within an inerrant view of the Bible. Religious leaders, for instance, could decide that interpretations of these passages have been incorrect—i.e. they should not be used to condemn sexual minority people today—but that the Scripture itself is still authoritative. Some Black religious leaders highlighted in following sections of this chapter have done exactly this. Nevertheless, gatekeepers who believe that Scripture condemns homosexuality may react negatively when a young man comes out and he may lose access to social capital.

*It's the End of the World/Moral Decline.* Some religious communities that hold inerrant views of the Bible also believe that the world is in a state of decline that will eventually lead to its destruction. At that point, religious adherents will either be taken to heaven (an immaterial place or state of perfection) or will reside on a new earth (a material place, but one that is perfect as opposed to the current, fallen earth). Some call this view *pre-millennial theology* or *eschatological pessimism* (Couch 1996)<sup>72</sup>. It follows a dualistic framework that it splits reality into a perfect afterlife and a corrupted present reality. Traditionally, Black expressions of Christianity have not adopted pre-millenarianism. Liberation theology, for instance, focuses on improving conditions for oppressed groups in the present, rather than ceding this fallen world to a heavenly future. Nevertheless, eschatological pessimism has become part of the belief system of many Black churches (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990).

Psychologists point out that eschatological pessimism is associated with greater

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<sup>71</sup> This literature typically relies on some quantitative measure of religiosity—i.e. religious attendance—rather than the content of religious beliefs (i.e. whether religious Black Americans hold different types of beliefs).

<sup>72</sup> Eschatology is the study of the end of time (Walls 2007).

levels of fear (Shariff & Ankin 2014), particularly towards out-groups who are seen as the catalysts of decline. Sexual minority people are one such out-group. Sexual minorities are framed as ushering the destruction of society in the “It’s the End of the World” narrative. In responding to an LGBT rights ordinance proposed in Birmingham for instance, Thomas Beavers (a Missionary Baptist pastor), warns that “America is rapidly falling away from God”: “America needs to be bothered, needs to be changed<sup>73</sup>” because of its acceptance of homosexuality<sup>74</sup>.

Other religious leaders have applied the “It’s the End of the World” narrative specifically to the decline of the Black community. In these narratives, sexual minority people are not only abominations (divinity ethic), but are also responsible for the destruction of the Black community (community ethic). Gregory Daniels (a Missionary Baptist pastor from Phoenix) emphasizes that “homosexuality is what has destroyed the Black community<sup>75</sup>.”

Often these narratives combine religious language with concerns about Black masculinity. Jamal Bryant (a Church of God in Christ pastor from Baltimore) calls homosexuality a “conspiracy to destroy Black boys<sup>76</sup>.” Homosexuality and “sanctified sissies” are causes of the breakdown of the Black man and thus the Black family. Bryant ties together the narrative of moral decline with language about Black masculinity. He fears that in “in the absence of a Black male presence”, the church has become

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<sup>73</sup> Beavers, T. (2013, May 7). Is there such a thing as a homosexual Christian? Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey464FvRjpM>.

<sup>74</sup> Beavers also integrates disgust-based narratives, calling homosexuality “abomination” and “disgusting”, comparing it to bestiality.

<sup>75</sup> Daniels, G. (2007). Interview with Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report. In A. Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black church: How faith, politics and fear divide* (2013, p. 44). Westport, CT: Praeger.

<sup>76</sup> Bryant, J. (2014, June 3). I am my enemy’s worst nightmare. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT\\_0H2EnQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ).

“feminized” and that “the family is no longer defended<sup>77</sup>.” Voddie Baucham (a Baptist pastor from Houston) similarly discusses the “gay agenda” as a threat to the Black community. Baucham compares homosexuality to pedophilia, stating that (presumably White) gay men have a desire to abuse young Black boys:

Stonewall is about homosexuals rioting the closing of bathhouse, where they molested underage boys. And our President compares civil rights to the molestation of young boys? How dare you. The number one group adopting young boys is gay people, especially adopting young black boys.

A final framing of the “It’s the End of the World” narrative may affect sexual minority people profoundly when they are first dealing with their non-heterosexuality. Some religious leaders emphasize that homosexuality leads to personal destruction. Unless they repent of their homosexuality, sexual minority people do not have a relationship with God<sup>78</sup> and thus are destined to spend their afterlife in hell<sup>79</sup>. Stacy Swimp (a pastor from Flint, Michigan) believes that sexual minority people “hate God” and invite his wrath: “God will indeed bring to destruction all who have declared war against [Him]...It seems homosexuals believe suicide is a civil right<sup>80</sup>.” Others religious leaders that uphold a narrative of personal destruction do not speak in these combative terms, but rather warn sexual minority people to turn from homosexuality in order to avoid personal destruction (i.e. hell). Like these leaders, gatekeepers may react negatively to young men when they come out of concern rather than animus.

### Ethic of Love

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> As it is not possible to be in the presence of God when one is outside the natural order

<sup>79</sup> Depending on which narrative of disgust is held, this script (i.e. going to hell) may or may not be avoidable. For instance, if the narrative of personal destruction is combined with the “You Can Change” narrative, a person may be able to avoid hell by changing their sexual orientation.

<sup>80</sup> Swimp, S. (2013, December 30). What does it mean when homosexuals and lesbians announce they are “coming out”? Retrieved from <http://stacyswimp.net/2013/12/30/what-does-it-mean-when-homosexuals-and-lesbians-announce-they-are-coming-out/>.

Some Black Christians eschew these negative narratives in their attempt to love sexual minority people. The “Ethic of Love” narrative relies on the liberty/harm principle (i.e. the autonomy ethic). We are to love people and support them in their life choices (liberty), as long as they are not hurting anybody (harm). The primary aim of the Christian is to love and support, not to judge and draw boundaries around the natural order. As opposed “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin” narrative, the “Ethic of Love” narrative shifts focus away from homosexuality as a contaminating factor. Instead, it focuses on Christian’s duty to love everyone<sup>81</sup>. Those who hold an “Ethic of Love” narrative sometimes point to Jesus as the primary example of Christian love. One community member denounced a religious liberty bill because it did not exemplify this love:

I am heavily dismayed when I hear that people of my faith truly believe that discriminatory laws such as Indiana’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) are admissible...At the end of the day, I believe in compassion, empathy, and a concern for human dignity. Jesus is compassion. Jesus is mercy. Jesus is forgiveness. Jesus is just. Jesus is grace. Jesus is love. Jesus never turned away a human in need. He embraced them with open arms<sup>82</sup>.

The “Ethic of Love” narrative may be considered a form of *non-homophobic everyday theology* (Moon 2004), although one that may be ambivalent about the morality of homosexuality. Religious individuals who adopt this narrative embrace sexual minority people, but have not developed a formal theology that affirms homosexuality<sup>83</sup>. The “Ethic of Love” narrative thus falls somewhere in between narratives of disgust that

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<sup>81</sup> Although it does not explicitly state that homosexuality is within the natural order

<sup>82</sup> Di Venuto, Latisha (2015, April 2). Living Christ’s love: Would Jesus turn people away? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.believeoutloud.com/latest/living-christs-love-would-jesus-turn-people-away-RFRA>.

<sup>83</sup> They typically either do not know what the Bible says or have a vague sense that the Bible disapproves of homosexuality.

place homosexuality outside the natural order and formally affirming theologies that place homosexuality inside the natural order. Between these two framings of homosexuality, it does not provide a clear script for sexual minority people. In the following chapters, I explore how this form of non-homophobic everyday theologies plays out in the lives of sexual minority men. In settings where almost every message a young man receives about his sexuality is negative, these narratives—even if not explicitly affirming—may make a lasting, positive impact. Yet, in some ways, they may also fall short. Because these narratives fail to place sexual minorities within the natural order explicitly, some men may still feel alienated when they are employed in a church setting.

### Formal Theologies

Many Black religious leaders have developed formal theologies that include sexual minority people within the natural order. These theologies act as religious counternarratives and encourage sexual minority people to embrace and to be open about their sexuality. These narratives include critical scholarship, liberation theology, and Womanist theology.

*Critical Scholarship.* Over the past three decades, a large body of literature has critiqued the belief that the Bible condemns homosexuality (e.g. Brownson 2013; Helminiak 2000; McNeill 1993; Spong 1992). This literature first spread across Mainline Protestant churches, but has more recently gained footing in some Catholic and Evangelical Protestant churches (Baldock 2014). Ward (2005) notes that Black ministers and congregations have been relatively distrustful of generally white-dominated

approaches to biblical scholarship and revisionism<sup>84</sup>.

Nevertheless, recently critical examination has emerged from within Black churches (e.g. Peter Gomes' *The Good Book* (1996) and Rommell Weekly's *Homosexuality* (2009)). Furthermore, a number of Black religious leaders cite critical scholarship as central in their decision to shift from a negative to a positive narrative about homosexuality. Rev. Dr. Delman Coates (a Baptist pastor from Washington, DC) came to affirm sexual minority people by studying Scripture:

I want it to be very clear that I regard myself as an evangelical pastor who believes in the authority of Scripture. As such, my unapologetic support for gay and lesbian Christians is not despite my view of Scripture, but because of it. As a believer and Bible scholar, my careful and close reading of the Old and New Testaments in their original languages leads me to very different conclusions about what the scriptures commonly used to condemn gays and lesbians are actually referencing<sup>85</sup>.

Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton (a non-denominational pastor from Baltimore) similarly states that his experiences with LGBT people played the most important role in shifting towards an affirming stance, but that his study of Scripture confirmed what was already happening in his heart:

In my experience, familiarity with loved ones or LGBT persons who are open about their sexual identity (i.e. "out" LGBT persons) significantly contribute to the development of more inclusive perspectives regarding sexual differences. While academic study facilitated my journey toward inclusive theology, the decisive moments involved friendships with "out" LGBT persons who challenged and expanded my theological and cultural boundaries. Warm relationships, not cold logic, transformed me<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> This may rely in part on the historical exclusion of Black individuals from White churches.

<sup>85</sup> Coates, Rev. Dr. D. (2015, April 9). A letter to the National Baptist Fellowship of Concerned Pastors [weblog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.manyvoices.org/blog/2015/04/a-letter-to-the-national-baptist-fellowship-of-concerned-pastors/>.

<sup>86</sup> Braxton, Rev. B. (2012, May 15). Same-sex marriage support a sign of love, acceptance and devotion to God. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/same-sex-marriage-support-a-sign-of-love-acceptance-and-devotion-to-god/2012/05/16/gIQAlkFkTU\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/same-sex-marriage-support-a-sign-of-love-acceptance-and-devotion-to-god/2012/05/16/gIQAlkFkTU_story.html).



As was the case with Rev. Braxton, personal relationships often lead to acceptance of LGBT people (Herek 1984; Herek & Glunt 1993). A relationship with a sexual minority person may for instance transform into some sort of non-homophobic everyday theology for a gatekeeper who once based her condemnation of homosexuality in Scripture. She loves and accepts the person, but has not necessarily determined her theological position on homosexuality. This relationship then may lead her back to Scriptures she once believed condemned homosexuality and they may then reassess her interpretation of those Scriptures. For these gatekeepers, critical scholarship would not play the initial role in accepting a young sexual minority, but may play an important role in solidifying their support and the young person's long-term access to social capital.

*Liberation Theology.* One theological tradition—liberation theology—has enjoyed a longer history within the Black church than has critical scholarship. Liberation has been an impulse in Black religion since its beginnings, but liberation theology was formalized in the mid twentieth century (Warnock 2013). Liberation theology holds that God is always on the side of oppressed peoples, rather than their oppressors. Because God values justice, He believes that all people groups should be liberated and works throughout history to this end (Smith 1991). Throughout the history of the Black church, liberation-oriented theologians have drawn upon the Exodus story in the Hebrew Bible to make parallels to their own situation. God had delivered his people—the Israelites—from captivity in Egypt. In a similar, way He would deliver Black Americans from their bondage in the West (Cone 2010). Liberation theology was most popularized by James Cone (2010), who (in the *Cross and the Lynching Tree*) depicted Jesus as a figure who suffered alongside Black individuals and led the way to their earthly emancipation.

Today, liberation theology is firmly rooted within many Black churches, especially American Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990).

Liberation theology in Black churches is less often applied to the oppression against sexual minority people (Sneed 2010). Religious leaders and community members who support sexual minority people lament this fact. Olivia Smarr (community member) recalls her experience attending a church that promoted liberation theology but maintained a negative narrative about homosexuality. She holds that true liberation theology can never involve fighting for the rights of one group while oppressing another:

I come from a Black church tradition that embraces liberation theology and upholds justice as an integral part of the Christian faith. Yet, I experienced homophobic sermons and harmful messages about sexuality in that same church. If your liberation theology doesn't include justice for Queer people, is it truly liberating? There is no "watered down" version of the movement for Black liberation. You cannot fight for justice for only the people that you know, or the people that you like, or the people whose lives don't challenge your own privilege. You cannot commit to fighting for justice for some and not for others<sup>87</sup>.

Some pastors draw an explicit connection between Black and LGBT struggles, applying liberation theology to their work for including LGBT people in Black churches. Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler (Bible Professor at Union Seminary) urges Black Americans to take part in the struggle for LGBT justice because there is more strength in unity than division:

Every human being reflects a part of God. God's divinity is impressed upon our being, regardless of our race, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or ability and that invests us all with value. If we are all created in God's image, we should all be equally valued. That means we as a church need to affirm all of God's children. In every page of Scripture, God is talking about social justice, reminding us that the way we treat those we least regard is how we're treating God's self. It's that simple. LGBT justice is

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<sup>87</sup> Smarr, O. (2015, April 2). Laying my burdens down: Embracing Black, queer Christians in the church [weblog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.manyvoices.org/blog/2015/04/laying-my-burdens-down-embracing-black-queer-christians-in-the-church/>.

truly one of the most significant contemporary civil rights struggles and very much a part of our work as African Americans. Our ideological opponents have attempted to drive a wedge between African American clergy and the LGBT community. We must realize that we are in a common struggle and that by coming together we have much more strength<sup>88</sup>.

Platonized Christianity has likely influenced churches that embrace Black liberation theology but hold negative narratives about sexual minority people. This is somewhat ironic according to Brown Douglas (2006), as Platonized Christianity has also been used to oppress Black people historically. Nevertheless, the possibility exists within liberation theology to embrace all oppressed groups of people. When LGBT people are viewed as an oppressed minority group, rather than a threat or an object of disgust, liberation theology can be applied to them as well (Sneed 2010).

*Womanist Theology.* Womanist theology critically examines oppressive social structures—including patriarchy and White supremacy—as they affect the experiences of Black women in churches and society (Mitchem 2014). In this way, Womanist theology is similar to Black feminism. More specifically than Black feminism, however, it focuses on the effect of theology in supporting these structures. Womanist theology “talks back” (hooks 1989) to theologies that subordinate Black women including theological discourses dominated by White men, White women and Black men. Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, a Womanist theologian who had previously not taken position on same-sex marriage, stated her support for same sex marriage in 2012. Rev. Weems criticizes religious leaders who rely strongly on ancient, Biblical laws to condemn homosexuality, when these same laws discriminate against women:

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<sup>88</sup> Sadler, Rev. Dr. R. (2014, October 13). Reflecting God and rethinking scripture [weblog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.manyvoices.org/blog/2014/10/reflecting-god-rethinking-scripture/>.

I disagree with those who see legalizing same sex marriage as a threat to the Bible, Christianity, or the institution of marriage. I agree that legalizing same sex marriage is a threat to thousands of years of tradition. But that isn't a bad thing, mind you. I would be a slave, and a barefoot and pregnant one at that, if tradition hadn't been questioned or challenged. Not to mention that lots of other important scientific knowledge we now embrace would not be known to us if we'd stayed tied to the biblical cosmos...The Bible meant well in its edicts on human sexuality. But not many of us, including Rev. Bryant, would not want to live in biblical times. And not just because there was no running water back then. We wouldn't want to live in the moral and social universe it advocates where wearing glasses disqualifies you from serving at God's altar, contact with a menstruating woman makes you unclean, and adulterers must be stoned to death. Yet I understand what made our biblical ancestors want to contain this powerful, chaotic force known as human sexuality. But biblical teachings on human sexuality (if teachings are what we can call the inchoate biblical passages that deal with sexual issues) don't serve us well today. We know too much. (The same laws probably didn't serve people well back then either.) Gay love is as old and tenacious as heterosexual love. And love and sexual desire have a tendency to make a mockery of rules. Human sexuality is powerful, confusing, dangerous, many times beautiful, most often messy. Laws are good, but laws are limited<sup>89</sup>.

Rev. Weems' progression reflects the increasing application of Womanist theology to include sexual minority people. Over the past decade, Womanist theologians have focused specifically on the negative effects that Platonized Christianity has had on Black sexual minority people (Brown Douglas 1999, 2005; Townes 2006)<sup>90</sup>. The analysis of Platonized Christianity in Chapter 2, for instance, drew from the work of the Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas. Because of its specific focus on deconstructing theological narratives that harm oppressed groups, Womanist theology may offer the

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<sup>89</sup> Weems, Rev. R. (2012, May 14). What's that you were saying about traditional marriage [weblog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.somethingwithin.com/blog/?cat=215>.

<sup>90</sup> The focus has been primarily on Black sexual minority women within Black churches, but can be applied to men as well.

most promise in putting forward a formal theology of inclusion for LGBT people within Black churches<sup>91</sup>.

### **Community Narratives**

Whereas religious narratives are grounded in a society's idea of the natural order, community narratives are based on a community's concept of the common good.

According to the community ethic, groups matter and must be protected by group members. Individuals thus have an obligation to play their assigned role for the good of the community. In Chapter 2, I discussed how American society came to define heterosexuality as part of the common good—and sexual minority people as a threat to that good—through the master narrative of the heterosexual-homosexual binary. In this section, I focus on public narratives that address homosexuality in relation to the perceived common good of the Black communities.

Using the term “common good” in regards to Black communities implies that there is a singular Black community—one that has unified concerns, goals and values. Reality belies this simplistic view. Nevertheless, community-based public narratives about sexuality historically arose within Black communities out of a sense of “linked fate” (Dawson 2003). The idea of linked fate holds that actions or injustices faced by one Black person or group of Black individuals affects all Black individuals generally. Linked fate has strengthened Black communities, in that has promoted solidarity and collective resistance to oppression. Yet, some manifestations of linked fate have also placed demands—or scripts—on Black individuals in regards to sexuality. When these scripts involve compulsory heterosexuality or procreation, they are unattainable by Black

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<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, given that many churches have not even embraced the full equality of women within churches, this may be a slow process.

sexual minority people. As a result, sexual minority people may be seen as not doing what is necessary to uphold the common good of the Black community<sup>92</sup>, and they risk becoming objects of contempt.

### Regulating Black Sexuality

Public narratives about homosexuality within Black communities share intricate ties to the hegemonic, master narratives of heterosexism and racism. In particular, sexualized racism has forced Black communities to create reactionary narratives about sexuality and masculinity (Hills-Collins 2004). Two narratives—the “Politics of Respectability” and “Be fruitful and Multiply”—are in part responses to White racism. They involve the regulation of sexuality to serve the perceived good of the Black community.

*Politics of Respectability.* As previously mentioned, Brown Douglas (2005) explains that Black individuals living in the West adopted Platonized Christianity in order to secure a better position in society (i.e. the hermeneutic of appropriation). By setting aside sexual passion—and discussion of sexuality in general—Black individuals could transcend the sexual demonization directed toward them by their White oppressors. Gross (1997) explains that “the ideological nature of these politics constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values” and “resulted in narratives which can be characterized as culturally defensive” (p. 6). The primary narrative that upholds this

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<sup>92</sup> Some scholars suggest that the phenomenon of “linked fate” is on the decline in Black communities (Lacy 2015). This may be true. If so, narratives about sexuality developed in earlier periods of American history may be less relevant to Black communities today. Nevertheless, narratives may outlast their initial social utility. Furthermore, certain groups may still find these narratives valuable—even crucial—toward upholding the common good of the Black community. These groups may have a stronger sense of linked fate than Black individuals who either never held or have abandoned community-based narratives about sexuality.

response is the “Politics of Respectability”<sup>93</sup>. Clarke (2004) finds this adoption of this narrative in Black communities troubling:

In an effort to debunk the social discourses that promote the pathology of Black sexuality, many of us have overcompensated and assimilated the Puritan value that sex is for procreation, occurs only between men and women, and is only valid within the confines of heterosexual marriage (p. 251).

West (1993) argues that the adoption of the “Politics of Respectability” narrative has led many within Black communities to “avoid any substantive engagement with Black sexuality” (p. 123), including homosexuality.

Homosexuality falls outside the script of the “Politics of Respectability” narrative, which normalizes heterosexuality. Some community members emphasize that because being open about one’s non-heterosexuality is not respectable, sexual minorities should keep their sexual orientation hidden: “I’d rather them stay in the closet. Why come out? Especially for folks that are not for such a lifestyle, stay in the closet. It’s the respectable thing to do<sup>94</sup>.” In response to President Obama’s support of gay rights, other community members decry the lack of moral standards within the United States. One community members emphasizes that Black individuals are the exemplars of morality within society:

It's a shame that I had something to do with Obama's presidency, I thought I was making a positive contribution to this system. I've been duped. This country is soulless, and they always get blacks to do their bidding. There was a time when Blacks had standards and others looked to us as examples of morality. Many of us have given in to this material world, and

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<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that respectability politics is not unique to Black communities. It is ultimately based on a Western dualistic shame about sexuality. Respectability politics in Black communities is largely a response to the way that White communities used sexuality to shame Black women and men.

<sup>94</sup> L.G. [pseudonym]. (2012, May 25). Re: Why don’t more Black celebrities come out of the closet [weblog comment]? Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2012/05/25/why-dont-more-black-celebrities-come-out-of-the-closet/>.

are willing to do anything to be a part of that circle. Who do can we turn to now? Not the whites nor the blacks. God help us<sup>95</sup>!

Others do not appear to disapprove of homosexuality per se. But they believe that no one—gay or straight—should talk about their sexual practices openly (they should “stay in the bedroom”). Nevertheless, this script seems to imply that LGBT people should not share any aspects of their relationships (not just the sexual parts), which is more than what is expected of heterosexual people. As a result of the politics of respectability, many sexual minority men in the Black community may be dissuaded from disclosing their sexual orientation (i.e. they may be silenced). Those men that come out may embarrass other community members by putting on display a non-normative sexuality, and may be treated with contempt and exclusion. As a result, they may lose access to social capital in spaces where the “Politics of Respectability” narrative operates.

*Be Fruitful and Multiply/Bionationalism.* Contrary to the “Politics of Respectability” narrative, the “Be Fruitful and Multiply” narrative involves active discussion about sexual issues (albeit in a proscribed manner). Mirroring the popularity of bionationalism within White communities in the late nineteenth century (discussed in Chapter 2), some Black community leaders began to encourage procreation as one way that Black women and men should contribute to their communities (Mitchell 2004). Like the politics of respectability, the dominance of this narrative may also be partly attributed to experiences of racism. During the years of the Great Migration of Black Americans to urban areas in the North, the Black population was feared to be in decline. Some

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<sup>95</sup>R.L. [pseudonym] (2013, June 27). Re: Obama clashes with African host over gay rights [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2013/06/27/obama-clashes-with-african-host-over-gay-rights/>.



community leaders reacted with calls for responsible sexual practices and procreation as a way to sustain Black communities. Mitchell (2004) explains:

In an era when sexual terrorism was an ominous reality for black Americans, at a time when disease and early death cast a pall over many black households, a significant mass of black women and men acted upon the notion that the race's destiny and sexual practices were intertwined...Reform-minded black women and men proceeded to contend that race progress was contingent upon eradicating vice, increasing the number of "well-born" children, and monitoring sexuality." Racial reproduction and collective destiny were wed on the pages of tracts, manuals, and pamphlets-propagandistic works known alternately as conduct, advice, or prescriptive literature (p. 80).

Although the historical context has changed, the idea that "being fruitful and multiplying" is one way to serve the Black community has persisted<sup>96</sup>. One community member voices the narrative by recounting the historical atrocities faced by Black Americans:

[We are] a people who withstood all the atrocities of being stripped of their culture, forced to survive in a land for hundreds of years as slaves. The old ones died off first and the newer generations had not a glimpse or remembrance as to where their parents came from, being born in this new Godforsaken land...[Yet] those who survived, proved how strong indeed we as a people are...All the way up from the fields to the "White House" of this nation<sup>97</sup>.

He then connects this struggle with the necessary to be community-minded by procreating and sustaining a family. Illustrating this mandate with Biblical language<sup>98</sup>, he explains that homosexuality not only violates God's created (natural) order but is selfish in that it fails to sustain Black communities:

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<sup>96</sup> Narratives based in bionationalism have persisted in predominantly White communities as well (Joyce 2009).

<sup>97</sup> S.L.E. [pseudonym]. (2014, May 31). Re: "Naris Fleming, gay Connecticut teen, crowned high school prom queen [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/05/31/nasir-fleming-gay-connecticut-teen-crowned-high-school-prom-queen/>.

<sup>98</sup> The command to be fruitful and multiply comes from Genesis 1:28.

As a race of people, we aren't defeated and never will be. We will continue to rise. But there are others who choose to escape into the decadence of their own undertaking and still demand that to acknowledge their abomination [homosexuality] brings a legitimate cause for them to be front and center...[But] God has brought forth into the world a man and woman, to be fruitful and multiply. Any deviation from that perspective is of the lower state of mind and not in the eyes or scheme of creation. Man cannot survive laying down with his brethren<sup>99</sup>.

The “Be Fruitful and Multiply” narrative has been promoted to sustain Black communities. Yet, when this script is used to castigate sexual minority people who cannot have children through heterosexual coitus, it is dangerous to them. Young sexual minority people may grow up feeling like they have less to give to their communities than their heterosexual peers.

#### Narratives about Black Masculinity

Another set of narratives relates homosexuality to concerns about masculinity within Black communities. The “Real Man” narrative represents an idealized form of Black masculinity that ultimately draws from hegemonic masculinity. The “Plight of Black Men” narrative focuses on the precarious position of Black men in society and the risks they face in navigating the transition to adulthood. The “Down Low” narrative poses Black sexual minority men as threats to the Black community. None of these narratives provides a positive script for Black sexual minority men to follow.

*Real Man.* From the beginning of their experience in the West, Black women and men have been dehumanized (Hills-Collins 2004). For Black men, this has created a centuries-long effort to reclaim manhood in Black communities<sup>100</sup>. Unfortunately, the

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<sup>99</sup> S.L.E. [pseudonym]. (2014, May 31). Comment on “Naris Fleming, gay Connecticut teen, crowned high school prom queen [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/05/31/nasir-fleming-gay-connecticut-teen-crowned-high-school-prom-queen/>.

<sup>100</sup> That reclaiming personhood even required reclaiming manhood specifically relied in part on dualistic, Western notions of gender—i.e., that male and female were important social categories. Wiegman (1995)

process to reclaim manhood has largely relied on the cultural value of hegemonic masculinity (Neal 2015). During the era of chattel slavery, gender hierarchy was suppressed, yet free Black people largely mirrored White society in terms of gender conventions (Horton 1986). Reconstruction policies reinforced White patterns of hegemonic masculinity (Hodes 1993) by providing relatively more opportunities to Black men than Black women. From the Jim Crow era to the present time, some Black men felt that to succeed they needed to assert their masculinity in a way that reflected the values of White-dominated society (Bair 1992; Cullen 1994; Estes 2006; Matthews 1998; Satter 1996; White 1990). In other words, they needed to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity.

Neal (2015) believes that hegemonic masculinity, in the form *Strong Black Man*, is often upheld as bedrock to the common good of Black communities<sup>101</sup>. While there are positive aspects to the *Strong Black Man*—he provides financial and moral stability to families and communities—it is also a “stunted, conservative, one-dimensional, stridently heterosexual vision of black masculinity” (p. 24). In other words, it very closely resembles the patriarch of hegemonic masculinity promoted by the “imagined community” discussed in Chapter 2. Some scholars explain that because heterosexuality is one of the few expectations of hegemonic masculinity that many Black men are able to meet due to the racialized social structure (Bonilla Silva 1997), it is emphasized in ideals of masculinity within Black communities (Froyum 2007; Neal 2015). This emphasis on

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explains: “For African American female and male slaves [in the New World] the possibilities of escaping the category of the inhuman took shape under a bizarrely liberating figuration of gendered subjectivity” (p. 11).

<sup>101</sup> Neal (2015) finds that hegemonic forms of Black masculinity are often strongly defended within Black communities: “Somehow when our mythical black nation is under siege and in crisis, the only thing that is not allowable, especially when at war, is the demise of the *Strong Black Man*” (p. 24).

heterosexuality is largely reactive in that it draws directly from historically White definitions of masculinity. The presence of homosexuality in Black communities threatens masculinity, which is already put in a perilous position through structural racism. Sexual minority men in Black communities became scapegoats for these concerns about masculinity. Johnson explains: “The Black homosexual becomes the site of displaced anger for the Black heterosexual, the scapegoat used to thwart his own feelings of inadequate manhood” (p. 37).

Some conceptions of the “Real Man” narrative attempt to distinguish Black masculinity from White masculinity, placing the former above the latter. The “Afrocentric” (or “real”) Black man is superior to the White man. This variation of the “Real Man” narrative reached its apex in Black Nationalism (Matthews 1998). Black Nationalism addressed homosexuality through both religious (homosexuality violated the natural order) and community-based narratives (heterosexuality and procreation as necessary to the common good)<sup>102</sup>. Asante (2003) explains: “Homosexuality and lesbianism are deviations from Afrocentric thought because they often make the person evaluate his or her own physical needs above the teachings of national consciousness<sup>103</sup>” (p. 72). White people on the other hand are more individualistic (disregarded the common good), and thus are more vulnerable to following unnatural passions (divinity ethic).

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<sup>102</sup>Although these narratives became hegemonic within the Black Nationalist movement, they were not universal. Huey Newton (1970), an early Black Nationalist leader, vigorously defending the rights of sexual minorities: “I know through reading and through my life experience and observations that homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in society. They might be the most oppressed people in society...The terms ‘faggot’ and ‘punk’ should be deleted from our vocabulary and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as President Nixon and Attorney General John Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people...We should be willing to discuss the insecurities that many people have with homosexuality. When I say insecurities, I mean the fear that they are some kind of threat to our manhood” (p.1).

<sup>103</sup> The focus on procreation as part of the common good also draws from the “Be Fruitful and Multiply” narrative.

Even among leaders who do not associate themselves with Black Nationalism, combining the “Real Man” narrative with religious narratives is common<sup>104</sup>. Men who do not embody these the traits of hegemonic masculinity fall outside the natural order and thus are to be treated as objects of disgust and contempt. Such men do not belong in Black community spaces—and must be expelled. Alfred Owens (pastor of a megachurch in Washington, DC) uses the narrative of the “Real Black man” to expel sexual minority men from religious spaces: “The church was never for punks or sissies, but you’re a real man when you can stand up and make a commitment to Jesus Christ<sup>105</sup>.”

Sexual minority men are particularly likely to be excluded from male spaces such as fraternities. One community member echoes the call for exclusion of gay men from Black fraternities:

When I look at a HBC's Fraternity, I am looking for real men, not openly gay men. I do not support the gay community, but I do not disrespect them. It was the young man's choice to be openly gay, but it is the fraternity choice not to select him. The fraternity should stand their ground on this one and not allow an openly or undercover gay person to be a part of their BROTHERHOOD!!!!!!<sup>106</sup>

The “Real Man” narrative relies heavily on stereotypes traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. To be a real man one must be macho<sup>107</sup>. Marlon Riggs (1991) reflects on the influence that the “Real Man” narrative has had on experience as a Black, gay man:

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<sup>104</sup> The “Real Man” narrative is particularly used by Black men to police the gender of other Black men. Whereas religious narratives play the key role in Black women’s rejections of homosexuality, the “Real Man” narrative is a more powerful predictor for men (Lemelle & Battle 2004).

<sup>105</sup> Owens, Bishop A. (2006, April 9). Fan or follower. Retrieved from [http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/cd\\_img/0505owens.mp3](http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/cd_img/0505owens.mp3).

<sup>106</sup> P.R. [pseudonym] Re: Morgan State University student claims rejection from Black fraternity for being gay: What this means now [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2013/10/30/morgan-state-university-student-claims-rejection-from-black-fraternity-for-being-gay-what-this-means-now/>

<sup>107</sup> Billson (2003) addresses this phenomenon in his discussion of the “cool pose”—the social expectation that Black men will perform in a hypermasculine way in public settings.

By the tenets of Black macho, true masculinity admits little or no space for self-interrogation or multiple subjectivities around race. Black Macho prescribes an inflexible idea: Strong Black men—“Afrocentric” Black men—don’t flinch, don’t weaken, don’t take blame or shit, take charge, step to when challenged, and defend themselves without pause for self-doubt. Against this warrior model of masculinity, Black Macho counterpoises the emasculated Other: the Other as punk sissy, Negro Faggot, a status with which any man, not just those who in fact are gay, can be branded should he deviate from rigidly prescribed codes of hypermasculine conduct (394).

Against the hegemony of hypermasculinity—or the “Black macho”—there may be strong motivation for Black men to avoid actions deemed feminine or for sexual minority men to hide their sexual orientation. If they break the scripts of hypermasculinity and heterosexuality, they may face significant losses in access to social capital in spaces where hegemonic masculinity is highly valued.

*Plight of Black Men.* Whereas the “Real Man” narrative has involved an attempt to reclaim manhood, the “Plight of Black Men” narrative focuses on the precarious position of Black men within American society. While Black men indeed face oppression, the “Plight of Black Men” narrative often perpetuates the idea that Black men are powerless. In this way, the narrative strips Black men of their agency. The vast majority of scholarly research and popular media on Black men, for instance, focuses on disparities in education, health, and the workplace. When research and the media focuses only on the negative and excludes the voices of Black men themselves, it may unintentionally send the signal that Black men are helpless.

The “Plight of Black Men” narrative is extended to Black sexual minority men through an almost exclusive focus on HIV/AIDS in research and the media. One community leader (Darien), who was also a study participant, explains that this exclusive

focus leads to a *narrative of risk*. Because Black men are framed as being at constant risk of contracting HIV, their assigned script is bleak; they are expected to “just become another statistic” in the epidemic. Within this narrative, the voices of Black sexual minority men are silenced. Gatekeepers who hold the “Plight of Black Men” narrative may react negatively when they learn that a young man is gay, either because they fear that heterosexism will be one more burden for him to carry in addition to racism or because they fear that he contract HIV and have a low quality of life. This reaction may be based more in fear for the sexual minority man than in disgust or contempt towards him.

*Down Low*. As discussed in Chapter 2, sexualized racism has rendered Black sexual minority men invisible in Black communities through *double containment* (Hills-Collins 2004) Because Black sexual minority men are so little understood, they are not only viewed as failing to upholding the common good of Black communities, but are sometimes also seen as threatening the common good. Author J.L. King stirred a moral panic when he appeared on the Oprah show in 2004 to discuss Black men and sexuality. His topic: the *down low*. Down low (or DL) men, according to King, have relationships with women but sex with men on the side (King & Hunter 2004). From the time of King’s interview the “down low” narrative has pervaded not only Black communities, but the mainstream media as well. The message is clear: *Beware of Black men. They may be on the down low*.

McCune (2014) notes that the “Down Low” narrative has long existed within Black communities, but was not always applied to sexual minority men (see also Boykin, 2005; Constantine-Sims, 2001; but see also Julien, 1989; Neihart, 2003; Nugent, 2002;

Schwarz, 2003). Originally, R&B and rap artists associated the down low with men who were unfaithful in heterosexual relationships. The “Down Low” narrative was applied to sexual minority men when the bridge theory (Malebranche et al. 2010) became a popular explanation of the rising rates of HIV infection in Black communities. According to bridge theory, bisexual men who had relationships with women but secretly had sex with men on the side drove rising HIV rates (Phillips 2005). These men were living on the “down low.”

Some people in Black communities view men on the “down low” with contempt. During an episode of *The Oprah Show* that focused on AIDS in Black communities, Eugene Rivers (a Pentecostal minister from Massachusetts) accused Black men on the down low of committing murder by infecting Black women with AIDS. He believed that these men should be put in jail<sup>108</sup>. Threatening the well-being of the Black community, they are too dangerous to be free. The “Down Low” narrative frames Black sexual minority with suspicion. Yet, because the narrative often coincides with other negative narratives about homosexuality—particularly that homosexuality is a detriment to the good of the community—sexual minority men cannot simply come out in order to avoid suspicion. They are still expected to stay in the closet. As a result, the “Down Low” narrative creates a trap for Black sexual minority men. They are discouraged from coming out, yet treated with suspicion for remaining in the closet.

Phillips (2005) finds the application of the “Down Low” narrative to Black sexual minority may also feed a neo-racist agenda in three ways. First, applying the narrative only to Black men disregards the fact that White, bisexual men are as likely to present

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<sup>108</sup> Rakieten, E. (Executive Producer). (2006, October 26). *The Oprah Winfrey show* [Television series]. Chicago, IL: Harpo Productions.



themselves as heterosexual but engage in secretive sex with men (Sternberg 2001; Villarosa, 2001). The “Down Low” narrative thus serves as one more way that sexualized racism renders Black sexual minority men invisible in society. Second, the “Down Low” narrative places Black women and men at odds with each other (a “divide and conquer” strategy) by making women fearful that their male partners might be secretly having sex with men—and thus potentially acting as vectors of contamination. Even women who are supportive of sexual minority men within the Black community may be affected by this fear. One community member relates:

I do not hate anyone due to his sexual orientation, but I must admit I am scared. I do not trust any male. I said it and I own it and I am working on my issues with that. Every time I look at a man, I think of a cheater or a man on the down low and or both, thus I stay away. Please pray for me<sup>109</sup>!

Finally, the ubiquity of the “Down Low” narrative within mass media places Black men in the position of spectacle. Specifically the “Down Low” perpetuates the master narrative of sexualized racism against Black sexual minority men. Media depictions apply the controlling image of the *dangerous Black man*—a dehumanized figure that has an animalistic sexuality (Hills-Collins 2004).

### Community Counternarratives

Two narratives—intersectionality and “Appealing to African Roots”—challenge the idea that Black sexual minority people threaten or fail to contribute to the common good of Black communities. These narratives frame sexual minority people as equally valuable to the Black community, and encourage them to be open about their sexuality and their political concerns.

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<sup>109</sup> V.N. [pseudonym]. Comment on “Does down low culture make women homophobic” [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2012/05/24/does-down-low-culture-make-black-women-homophobic/>.

The Intersectionality narrative considers the various intersectional identities of Black Americans and expands the common good to fit lives of people at each of these intersections<sup>110</sup> (McCall 2005). One of these intersections includes being a Black and a sexual minority person. Rev. Cedric Harmon emphasizes the importance of considering the intersectional experiences of Black sexual minority people in Black communities, citing Audre Lorde: “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives<sup>111</sup>.” Rev. Dr. Dennis Wiley speaks about the dangers of ignoring intersection of race and sexuality. When the needs of sexual minority people within Black communities are ignored, the needs of the Black community are ignored:

This failure to ‘connect the dots’ deceives black and other marginalized groups into believing that dealing with vital issues impacting our communities can, at best, be postponed indefinitely, or, at worst, be ignored completely<sup>112</sup>.

Some community members believe that ignoring the needs of sexual minority people will cause further division within Black communities. One community member for instance emphasizes the need for unity through the acceptance of sexual minority people:

So, that's your golden answer: MORE division within the black race? Please enlighten me on how that's been working out for us so far and how's that's going to benefit us in the long run? The only way we as black people win and become a better people is that EVERYONE sticks together! If even one person gets left behind, we ALL lose<sup>113</sup>!

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<sup>110</sup> This is similar to liberation theology which focuses primarily on addressing the oppressions of Black individuals, but can be expanded to other intersections as well.

<sup>111</sup> Harmon, Rev. C.A. (2014, Dec. 11). Addressing injustices everywhere they are found [weblog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.manyvoices.org/blog/2014/12/addressing-injustices/>.

<sup>112</sup> Wiley, Rev. Dr. (2011, August 7). Gays are us: Why LGBT equality is not a “White” issue [weblog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2011/08/17/10206/gays-are-us/>.

<sup>113</sup> G.C. [pseudonym]. Comment on “Out and proud: Black gay trailblazers [weblog comment]. Retrieved from: [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2013/12/first\\_black\\_gay\\_celebrities\\_robin\\_roberts\\_joins\\_impressive\\_list.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2013/12/first_black_gay_celebrities_robin_roberts_joins_impressive_list.html).

Unfortunately, scholars find that this intersectional approach has been rare within Black community politics (Cohen 1999; Hills Collins 2004). In *Boundaries of Blackness*, Cohen (1999) documents how the AIDS crisis brought the stigma association with homosexuality to the foreground of the Black community. The treatment of community members living with HIV illuminated the boundaries of the Black communities. Sexual minority people fell outside that boundary. Nevertheless, leaders like Rev. Harmon and Rev. Wiley regularly challenge and expand these boundaries through their efforts to include the voices of sexual minority people in Black political and religious discourse.

*Appealing to African Roots.* Some sexual minority people in Black communities attempt to integrate their racial and sexual identities by appealing to their African ancestors who were sexual or gender minorities. By focusing on sexual and gender minorities in African history, Black sexual minority people are able to correct misperceptions that the African continent was historically devoid of homosexuality that has perpetuated the narrative of an “authentic” Black sexuality (Constantine-Simms 2001; Epprecht 2008). Furthermore, by reaching beyond the division of body (sexuality) and spirit, those who appeal to their African ancestors are able to deconstruct Platonized Christianity and its negative framing of sexual minority bodies. In this way, “Appealing to African Roots” operates similarly to Womanist theology, though without a theological focus. For instance, ADODI (a fraternity of Black gay men) is based on the Yoruba word for a “man that loves another man.” The founders explain the honored position of the Adodi in some African societies: “More than just a description of partners in Africa, the

Adodi thought to embody both male and female ways of being and were revered as shamans, sages and leaders<sup>114</sup>.”

### **Individual Rights Narratives**

Individual rights narratives rely on the autonomy ethic. According to the autonomy ethic, people operate primarily as individuals rather than members of larger social groups. People should be free to satisfy their wants and needs apart from the consideration of others in their social group, as long as doing so does not harm others or impinge on their right to satisfy their own wants and needs (i.e. the liberty/harm principle) (Haidt 2012). Narratives that have arisen from the autonomy ethic play an important role in the growing public acceptance of sexual minority people in Black communities and American society more broadly. Some community members who support sexual minority employ individual rights narratives (as opposed to religious or community counternarratives), such as the “Born This Way” and “Love is Love” narratives.

The “Born this Way” narrative holds that sexual minority people are born gay and that they have the same right to express their sexuality as heterosexual people do<sup>115</sup>. Some community members apply religious language to the “Born this Way” narrative<sup>116</sup>. For instance, one community member emphasizes that God makes people gay and cites the dangers of people denying who God made them to be:

There is but one choice for all of us and that is the choice of self-acceptance and self-love, to be who we are, accept and love who we are as

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<sup>114</sup> ADODI. (2015). The six principles. Retrieved from <http://www.adodi.org/the-six-principles/>.

<sup>115</sup> Constraints on sexuality may vary. Some people holding the “Born This Way” narrative believe that people may express their sexuality in any way that does not harm another person. Others may place limits such as monogamy or not having sex until marriage.

<sup>116</sup> In 2012, 76 percent who believe that people are born gay support gay marriage, versus 18 percent of those who do not (Pew 2012).

children of a loving God! Self-denial is a deadly toxin that kills one's inner spirit and creative energies! The strain of self-deception is a heavy load that takes a vicious toll on one's well being physically and spiritually and sometimes infects those around us! You cannot deny your true self without paying dire consequences! We cannot live a healthy life, our best life in constant state of inner turmoil, confusion and self-hate! No matter who the people may be or what people say, love the Wonderful God who made you, the God within you and love yourself and know that He (or She) is with you always<sup>117</sup>.

In the "Love is Love" narrative, same-sex intimacy is viewed as equally valuable to heterosexual intimacy. The "Love is Love" narrative ignores both the natural order of religious-based narratives and the impetus for procreation in community based narratives. To deny a person that right to love whom they choose would be violating a fundamental human right. One community member how she came to adopt a "Love is Love" narrative in thinking about the rights of sexual minority people:

Evolution of thinking is not a process that we can demand of others without including ourselves. I had my own issues, but have come to see that regardless the orientation, essentially the human experience is the same for us all. All of us wish to love and be loved in our own special way. To deny this is to deny one's own self in a most negative manner, a manner which can inflict pain on us all<sup>118</sup>.

Neither the "Born This Way" nor the "Love is Love" narratives are specific to Black communities. A final individual rights narrative, however, shares a historical link with the Black community and is also the subject of more controversy.

*Civil Rights.* Are gay rights civil rights? In her film *The New Black* (2013), Yoruba Richen finds that this question is hotly debated in Black communities. Many

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<sup>117</sup> A.1. [pseudonym]. (2013, May 5). Re: Antoine Dodson says he's no longer gay, homosexuality can be lifted [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2013/05/03/antoine-dodson-says-hes-no-longer-gay-claims-homosexuality-can-be-lifted/>.

<sup>118</sup> W.N. (2014, February 12). Re: Director of the New Black, Yoruba Richen, explores Black American on gay rights, Michael Sam's coming out [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/02/12/director-of-the-new-black-yoruba-richen-explores-black-america-on-gay-rights-michael-sams-coming-out/>.

LGBT rights activists have drawn parallels between the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the current struggle for LGBT rights (Carbado 1999). In this section I discuss both the widespread acceptance of civil rights language for sexual minorities among Black political leaders and pushback from community member (i.e. the “Show Me Your Scars” and “Invisible Stigma” narratives).

Obama, the first Black president of the United States, will also be remembered as the first president to fully embrace the civil rights of LGBT Americans. While some have criticized Obama as not representing the Black community in his acceptance of rights for LGBT people, Obama’s advocacy for sexual minorities—and his use of civil rights language in these efforts—is not unique amongst Black political leaders. Black politicians at the federal level are almost exclusively supportive of gay rights. Figure 3.1 shows the voting records of Black members of Congress between 2003 and 2014. The scores associated with each member of Congress represent their voting on LGBT related matters (Human Rights Campaign 2015). The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) provides a score from 0 to 100, where 0 represents no support for the rights of LGBT people and 100 represents full support. Black members of Congress scored 96 on average in the 2013-14 session (up from a score of 82 in the 2003-04 session). Furthermore, 90 percent of Black members expressed support for marriage equality in the 2013-14 session. The only Black members of Congress that were less supportive of LGBT equality were from conservative areas of the South. Even these congressional members of Congress were generally more supportive than other federal politicians in their states.

<i>Figure 3.1. Voting Record of Black Congressional Members on LGBT Issues</i>									
Name	St.	Pty.	House	113th 2013- 2014	112th 2011- 2012	11th 2009- 2010	110th 2007- 2008	109th 2005- 2006	108th 2003- 2004
John Lewis	GA	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	100
Eddie B. Johnson	TX	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	100
William Clay Jr.	MO	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	100
Barbara Lee	CA	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	100
John Conyers	MI	D	House	100	100	97	100	100	100
Donald Payne Jr.	NJ	D	House	100		97	95	100	100
Sheila J. Lee	TX	D	House	100	93	100	100	100	100
Alcee Hastings	FL	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	83
Elijah Cummings	MD	D	House	100	90	100	100	88	100
Eleanor H. Norton	DC	D	Delegate	100	100	100	100	67	100
Chaka Fattah	PA	D	House	100	100	100	100	100	63
Robert Scott	VA	D	House	100	100	100	100	75	55
Charles Rangel	NY	D	House	100	100	97	90	88	100
Bobby Rush	IL	D	House	100	94	94	90	63	88
James Clyburn	SC	D	House	100	100	97	95	50	55
Gregory Meeks	NY	D	House	100	82	94	85	88	83
David Scott	GA	D	House	100	80	70	55	38	55
Gwen Moore	WI	D	House	100	100	100	95	100	
Emanuel Cleaver	MO	D	House	100	90	91	86	75	
Al Green	TX	D	House	100	85	88	80	75	
Henry Johnson Jr.	GA	D	House	100	100	100	95		
Yvette Clarke	NY	D	House	100	100	100	90		
Donna Edwards	MD	D	House	100	100	100			
Marcia Fudge	OH	D	House	100	100	97			
Karen Bass	CA	D	House	100	100				
Frederica Wilson	FL	D	House	100	90				
Gloria N. McLeod	CA	D	House	100					
Cory A. Booker	NJ	D	Senate	100					
Steven Horsford	NV	D	House	100					
Joyce Beatty	OH	D	House	100					
Marc Veasey	TX	D	House	100					
Maxine Waters	CA	D	House	92	100	94	90	88	100
Andre Carson	IN	D	House	92	90	94			
Corrine Brown	FL	D	House	84	76	83	100	100	71
Danny K. Davis	IL	D	House	84	88	100	100	100	100
G.K. Butterfield	NC	D	House	84	75	76	70	63	44
Terri Sewell	AL	D	House	84	75				
Cedric Richmond	LA	D	House	84	75				
Hakeem Jeffries	NY	D	House	84					
Sanford D. Bishop	GA	D	House	76	30	60	70	38	44
Bennie Thompson	MS	D	House	60	75	80	75	38	55

Source: Human Rights Campaign (2015); U.S. House of Representatives

This voting may be due to pressure from the Democratic Party, which largely supports gay rights. Yet, Black politicians have not been passive followers in the effort for LGBT equality. They have led the efforts. After the Maryland Supreme Court ruled that the state's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional in 2006, Kweisi Mfume (former President of the NAACP) was the only candidate to come out for full civil rights for gays and lesbians (Mosk 2006). His fellow Democrats evaded the issue. When Black political leaders advocate for LGBT equality, Civil Rights is a persistent theme. Frederica Wilson (D-CA) connected the overturning of Proposition 8 to her work for racial equality: "As a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, I feel a personal connection to today's ruling. LGBT rights are civil rights<sup>119</sup>." Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) provided the most well-articulated and memorable objection to the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, connecting discrimination against LGBT people to racial discrimination:

Marriage is a basic human right. You cannot tell people they cannot fall in love. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used to say when people talked about interracial marriage and I quote, "Races do not fall in love and get married. Individuals fall in love and get married." I will not turn my back on another American. I will not oppress my fellow human being. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation...Mr. Chairman, I have known racism. I have known bigotry. This bill stinks of the same fear, hatred and intolerance. It should not be called the Defense of Marriage Act. It should be called the Defense of Mean-spirited Bigots Act...We are moving toward the 21st century. Let us come together and create one nation, one people, one family, one house, the American house, the American family, the American nation<sup>120</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup>Wilson, F. (2013, June 26). Press Release: Supreme Court rulings are a victory of same-sex marriage and equality. Retrieved from <http://wilson.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congresswoman-frederica-wilson-supreme-court-rulings-are-victory-for>.

<sup>120</sup> Lewis, J. (1996, July 11). *Congressional Record* (p. 441-2). Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/1996/07/11/house-section/article/H7441-2>.



Others believe that, although Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not explicitly support LGBT equality, he would have evolved over time. They base their support for LGBT equality on this contention. Jim Clyburn (D—South Carolina), who had previously opposed same-sex marriage, came out in support in 2012:

I think Dr. King would have evolved, much like President Obama has evolved, much like I have evolved... I don't believe that at the time that Dr. King passed away or was taken from us that he was then where I am today. I just don't believe that. I don't remember him ever addressing this in any of his writings or speeches, but I believe that all of us grow. I think it was Thomas Jefferson who once said one should not be expected to wear the same jacket as a man that he wore as a child. That's the way I feel. And I think that I have grown to a different size jacket today when it comes to this question<sup>121</sup>.

Emmanuel Cleaver (D—MO), a Methodist minister, likewise previously opposed same-sex marriage due to his religious beliefs<sup>122</sup>. By 2012, Cleaver combined Civil Rights with religious language of liberation in his support for marriage equality: “Neither the Jewish prophets nor Jesus Christ ever spoke of it. What Jesus did talk about was love<sup>123</sup>.”

The support of Black political leaders extends to the state and local levels. All Black members of Obama’s Cabinet voiced their support for marriage equality long before the 2015 Supreme Court ruling. Eric Holder<sup>124</sup> (Attorney General), in particular, played a historic role in overturning federal discrimination against LGBT

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<sup>121</sup> Clyburn, J. (2012, May 14). The Situation Room (CNN) [interview]. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1205/14/sitroom.01.html>.

<sup>122</sup> He supported the Federal Marriage Amendment in 2006, stating: “Marriage is an institution by God signifying the uniting of this man and this woman in holy matrimony”. Clyburn, J. (2006, July 18). Congressional Record: H5287-5321. Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2006-07-18/html/CREC-2006-07-18-pt1-PgH5287-5.htm>.

<sup>123</sup> Cleaver, E. (2013, June 26). Congressman Cleaver’s statement following today’s Supreme Court Ruling. Retrieved from <http://cleaver.house.gov/press-release/congressman-cleavers-statement-following-todays-supreme-court-rulings>.

<sup>124</sup> AP/Huffington Post (2011, February 23). Obama: DOMA unconstitutional, DOJ should stop defending in Court. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/23/obama-doma-unconstitutional\\_n\\_827134.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/23/obama-doma-unconstitutional_n_827134.html).

people. Both recent Black governors—Deval Patrick<sup>125</sup> (New York) and David Paterson<sup>126</sup> (New Jersey)—advocated for marriage equality in their states. Of the twenty-eight Black mayors of major US cities over the past decade, eighteen voiced their support for same-sex marriage; five voiced their support for legal recognitions of same-sex relationships, but not marriage; four remained silent on the issue; and only one<sup>127</sup> voiced his disapproval for legal recognition of same-sex relationships. In cities where LGBT protections have come before the city board, Black members have often played key roles as advocates. Many times these Black politicians were in the minority as supporters of LGBT rights in communities that were both hostile to the expansion of rights for sexual minority people and had historically been controlled by White politicians. Charles Tillman<sup>128</sup> (Jackson, MS), Jonathan Austin<sup>129</sup> (Birmingham, AL), and C. Denise Marcelle<sup>130</sup> (Baton Rouge, LA) all put their political careers on the line to protect sexual minority people. In doing so, they invoked Civil Rights language.

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<sup>125</sup> Patrick, D. (2012, October 11). Remarks at Empire State Pride Agenda's 2012 fall dinner. Retrieved from <http://www.mass.gov/governor/pressoffice/speeches/101112-empire-state-agenda-fall-dinner.html>.

<sup>126</sup> Paterson, D. (2009, April 16). Governor Paterson's remarks on the introduction a marriage equality bill. Retrieved from [http://www.ny.gov/governor/keydocs/speech\\_0416091.html](http://www.ny.gov/governor/keydocs/speech_0416091.html).

<sup>127</sup> Dwight C. Jones (Richmond, VA), who is also a Methodist minister. Lavers, M.K. (2014, March 17). Same-sex marriage opponent elected chair of Va. Dems. *Washington Blade*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/03/17/sex-marriage-opponent-elected-chair-virginia-democrats/>.

<sup>128</sup> Ferguson, D. (2014, June 6). Mississippi cities pass equality ordinances to fight state's anti-LGBT 'religious freedom' law. Raw Story. Retrieved from <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2014/06/mississippi-cities-pass-equality-ordinances-to-fight-states-anti-lgbt-religious-freedom-law/>.

<sup>129</sup> Bryant, J.D. (2013, March 6). Birmingham City Council committee endorses city-wide human rights commission. Retrieved from [http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2013/03/birmingham\\_city\\_council\\_commit\\_20.html](http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2013/03/birmingham_city_council_commit_20.html).

<sup>130</sup> Samuels, D. (2014, August 13). Baton Rouge anti-discrimination ordinance fails by vote of 4-8. Retrieved from [http://www.nola.com/news/baton-rouge/index.ssf/2014/08/baton\\_rouge\\_anti-discriminatio\\_2.html](http://www.nola.com/news/baton-rouge/index.ssf/2014/08/baton_rouge_anti-discriminatio_2.html).

Some community members also adopt Civil Rights language when discussing LGBT issues<sup>131</sup>. One community member, although not using the term *civil right* in relation to LGBT equality, urges members of the Black community to recognize “discrimination as discrimination<sup>132</sup>”, whether it is directed to racial minorities, sexual minorities, or people who fit into both categories. Another community member came to recognize the connection between civil rights for Black Americans and gay people through the experience of his lesbian sister: “Civil rights are civil rights, no matter who, when and where<sup>133</sup>.”

*Invisible Stigma.* Still, many other community members have pushed backed against applying Civil Rights language to LGBT people. One way in which some community members show that there is not a parallel between Black and LGBT political struggles is to emphasize that stigma based on race is visible, while stigma based on sexual minority status is invisible. LGBT individuals, that is, can hide their stigma but Black individuals cannot. One community member emphasizes this distinction<sup>134</sup>:

It is not that I am against people who are gay. But, what I do take issue with is how the Civil Rights Movement and gay rights are comparable. A gay person can hide their lifestyle if they choose. A black person cannot hide being black—no matter where they go, where they work, live or play. So, for me, there is a grave difference<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> This is the case even when they personally disapprove of same-sex relationships. When asked if a wedding-related business should be allowed to discriminate against same-sex couples, for instance, only 37 percent of Black Protestants agreed (as opposed to 71 percent of White Evangelical Protestants) (Gecewicz & Lipka 2014).

<sup>132</sup> A.W. [pseudonym]. (2014, June 12). Re: Say it loud: Black, gay and proud [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/06/12/say-it-loud-black-gay-proud/>.

<sup>133</sup> G.P. [pseudonym]. (2014, April 7). Re: Some hear race echoes in Virginia gay marriage ban [weblog comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2014/04/07/some-hear-race-echoes-in-virginia-gay-marriage-ban/>.

<sup>134</sup> Although she also states that she is personally supportive of LGBT rights

<sup>135</sup> A.H. [pseudonym]. (2013, April 30). Re: Black and gay: How race plays and role in Jason Collins coming out [weblog comment]. Retrieved from: <http://thegrio.com/2013/04/30/black-and-gay-how-race-plays-a-role-in-jason-collins-coming-out/>.

The “Invisible Stigma” narrative implies that LGBT people should live in the closet. Sometimes those who invoke the invisible stigma narrative also hold a negative narrative about homosexuality based in their religious beliefs. They decry attempts to compare the sin of homosexuality to the naturalness of Black identity. Gatekeepers who hold the “Invisible Stigma” narrative may look down upon sexual minority men who choose to come out.

*Show Me Your Scars.* An elderly Black man called in a radio show co-hosted by a Black minister who affirmed LGBT rights. Sincere but frustrated, the man questioned why the minister would spend so much time talking about LGBT issues. He had one challenge to LGBT rights advocates who drew upon Civil Rights language in the work: “Show me your scars<sup>136</sup>”. The “Show Me Your Scars” narratives holds that rights for sexual minority people should not be the concern of the Black community. Sexual minority people have not suffered to the same extent as the Black community.

Applying Civil Rights language to the LGBT rights movement is taken as insulting. Talbert Swan (a COGIC pastor from Massachusetts) decries gay people who attempt to use Civil rights language: “I don’t think it’s comparing apples to apples. The history does not compare and to me it’s quite insulting to try to make that connection<sup>137</sup>.” Swan notes that whereas Blacks have faced the oppression of slavery, Jim Crow and segregation there is little evidence that LGBT people are systematically disadvantaged in

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<sup>136</sup> G.J. [pseudonym]. (2012). Re: Black, White and Gay in America [podcast comment]. Retrieved from <http://blackwhiteandgay.com/>.

<sup>137</sup> Banks, A.M. (2015, July 17). Black clergy walk a fine line between religious liberty, discrimination. Washington Post. Retrieved from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/black-clergy-walk-a-fine-line-between-religious-liberty-discrimination/2015/07/17/5cf55204-2cc1-11e5-960f-22c4ba982ed4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/black-clergy-walk-a-fine-line-between-religious-liberty-discrimination/2015/07/17/5cf55204-2cc1-11e5-960f-22c4ba982ed4_story.html).

American society. He also asks where the gay community has as the Black Americans continue to face discrimination<sup>138</sup>.

One possible reason why the “Show Me Your Scars” narrative is common in Black communities is because there is a perception that LGBT people are rich and White. One community member contrasts gay people with Black people who “can’t even afford to get married to begin with<sup>139</sup>”. These comments are indicative of what some scholars have called a *Rich, White, Gay* narrative. The marketing industry has played a key role in perpetuating the myth that gay men are predominantly White and middle-class.

Throughout the 1990s, marketing firms promoted the “gay market”—presenting it as a potential growth area to consumer firms (Chasin 2001; Sender 2004). During this time, marketing research firms such as Simmons and Overlooked Opinions overestimated the average incomes of gay men. For instance, Overlooked Opinions stated that the average gay man earned \$42,000 in 1991 (as opposed to a median income for all males of \$20,500) and \$55,000 (as opposed to a median income of \$22,500). Empirical research since these surveys has demonstrated that gay men, in fact, earn less than their heterosexual counterparts (Badgett 1995; Berg and Lien 2002; Comolli 2005; Black et al. 2003; Cushing-Daniels and Yueng 2009; Allegretto and Ruther 2001; Clain and Leppel 2001; Gates 2009; Elmslie and Tebaldi 2007; Carpenter 2007).

Still, these stereotypes of gay men as wealthy and well educated have persisted through the *Rich, White, Gay* narrative. Gluckman and Read (1997) explain how this narrative shadows the existence of low-income and racial minority LGBT people: “The

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<sup>138</sup> Swan, T. (2003). No comparison between gay agenda and Civil Rights Movement. Retrieved from <http://srcogic.com/column>.

<sup>139</sup> S.I. [pseudonym]. Re: Gay rights backers await their Jackie Robinson [web log comment]. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2013/02/01/gay-rights-backers-await-for-their-jackie-robinson/>.

real contours of the multicultural, class-stratified gay populations are languishing in the closet, while images of White, upper-middle-class...gay men have become increasingly conspicuous” (p. 41). If the LGBT community continues as rich and White, then people within Black community might not be able to recognize the struggles of Black LGBT people within their communities.

Another possible reason why the “Show Me Your Scars” narrative is common is because much of the mainstream LGBT rights movement has ignored the fight for racial justice. The movement for LGBT rights began with radical roots, addressing racism and inequalities in the American class structure. The movement turned toward the private sphere as LGBT rights became more mainstream and some of the most powerful members of the community (White, middle-class men) infused it with neoliberalism<sup>140</sup> (Duggan 2002). The rise of neoliberalism marked the decline of radical critiques of American institutions (e.g. the family, the economy) and concerns about intersectionality (e.g. the experiences of sexual minority women, Black sexual minority people).

Often, efforts to include the concerns of racial minority people in LGBT politics are met suspicion or dismissal. Richard Mohr, for instance, warned LGBT organizations against developing partnerships with organizations that worked for racial or women’s equality. He called such efforts “a wasteful drain on the movement”, dismissing them as “communist fantasies” (in Hutchison 1999, p. 15). Bawer argues that racism and economic injustice are “issues yes—but gay issues?” (in Tucker 1997, p. 221). If the mainstream LGBT rights movement had remained focused on racial and economic

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<sup>140</sup> Neoliberalism, in this sense, is the privatization of many aspects of American life, including political struggles (Duggan 2002).

justice, there may be more openness to considering LGBT rights relevant to the concerns of Black communities today.

The “Show Me Your Scars” narrative does not provide a clear frame and script for sexual minority individuals. Yet it may be the case that Black sexual minority people who are considered to fight more for LGBT equality than for racial justice are looked down upon by holders of this narrative. In reality, the two struggles cannot be separated in the lives of Black sexuality minority people. Yet, the influence of marketization and neoliberal politics on the mainstream LGBT rights movement (among other factors) have driven apart the issues in the minds of White LGBT Americans and Black Americans alike.

### **Conclusion**

In her film *The New Black*, Yoruba Richen (whom I quoted in introducing this chapter) warns that ascribing a singular political or moral ideology to Black Americans is a flawed effort. In this chapter, I discussed some of the public narratives about homosexuality that are present within Black communities. Often held by scholars and the popular media to be more homophobic than other groups, Black Americans are vastly diverse in their framing of sexual minority people. Some Black individuals have adopted narratives that focus on upholding the “natural order” or “common good” and disapprove of homosexuality.

In many cases, these narratives stem in part from historical experiences of racism (e.g. religious narratives through the appropriation of Platonized Christianity, in order to overcome stereotypes of hypersexuality; the “Real Man” narrative through the dehumanization of Black men throughout American history). Still other community

members and leaders offer counternarratives that place sexual minority people within the “natural order” and “common good” of the Black community. Religious narratives, such as Liberation and Womanist theology, hold a key to overcoming the demonization of LGBT people not only amongst Black Americans but in Western society more generally.

Other Black individuals who support sexual minority people use individual rights narratives. Sometimes these narratives reflect the most common rights narrative regarding homosexuality in American society today (as with the “Born That Way” and “Love is Love” narratives). The use of Civil Rights language is more divisive amongst Black Americans. Some people in the Black community—including the overwhelming majority of political leaders—and use a “Civil Rights” narrative in advocating for this right. Others strongly disagree, pointing to dissimilarities between Black and LGBT experiences of discrimination.

In the following chapters, I consider how these narratives shape the reaction of a gatekeeper to sexual minority men in schools, homes and churches. Specifically, I investigate how these narratives operate differently across microsystems, and which narratives are associated with the largest losses of access to social capital for young men across microsystems.



## CHAPTER 4:

### **Who are the Real Men? Hegemonic Masculinity and Inclusive Masculinity in Schools**

In this chapter, I discuss the access that sexual minority men have to social capital in schools. Schools, as I conceptualize them, act as a “microcosm” of the imagined community discussed in Chapter 2. The cultural default in school communities is to uphold hegemonic masculinity<sup>141</sup> (DePalma & Atkison 2009, 2010; Ngo 2003; Pascoe 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is considered part of the common good of the school community (Plummer 2001). It forms a boundary between which male students are inside and which are outside the school community. Men who meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity uphold the common good, and are considered inside the boundary of the school community. Men who do not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity fail to uphold this good, and are outside the boundary of the school community. One critical aspect of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality. Students who do not meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity are assumed to be gay.

Marcus recalls:

I didn't fit the stereotype of the Black male mold that everybody is supposed to fit into. You didn't necessary play the basketball, the football or the track. Or you aren't trying to talk to every single girl. Then they're like, oh yeah, he's gay, he's gay. A lot of the time, people were saying, 'Oh yeah he's gay, he listens to people when he talks, he knows what you're saying, he hangs out with all the girls.'

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<sup>141</sup> Although what exactly comprises hegemonic masculinity varies across schools, each imagining of the concept bears similarities. For instance, males should not act in any way that associates them with femininity—in their dress and mannerisms, amongst other things (Donaldson 1993).

Outside the boundary of hegemonic masculinity, students like Marcus are subject to contempt and exclusion within the school community<sup>142</sup>.

Research has found that administrators play a critical role in determining school culture, including whether hegemonic masculinity has a place in the culture (Koschoreck 2003, 2010). Administrators are often complicit in promoting hegemonic masculinity (Blount 2003; Lugg 2006). If administrators hold negative narratives about homosexuality, for instance, they may block attempts to provide supports for sexual minority students or discipline them unfairly (Youdell 2004, 2005). In this way, they send the signal that sexual minority students are of less value within the school community.

More often, administrators uphold hegemonic masculinity unknowingly. Like the master narratives of heterosexism and racism, hegemonic masculinity has an aspect of denarrativization. It is simply business as usual. School leaders do not attempt to change the school culture because they do not see the need. Male students who violate hegemonic masculinity are bullied because “that is just what happens in school.” Other administrators want to help sexual minority students, but remain silent because they are ill-prepared to combat hegemonic masculinity<sup>143</sup> (O’Malley & Capper 2014; Marshall & Hernandez 2013). This silence has similarly negative effects on sexual minority students. Whether administrators actively encourage or passively allow hegemonic masculinity to operate within their school, sexual minority male students find themselves in vulnerable place outside the “imagined community” of their male peers.

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<sup>142</sup> This contempt is especially likely to come from male peers, who have the most at stake in hegemonic masculinity. If male students at the school fail to uphold hegemonic masculinity by not excluding their gay classmate, they may be subject to contempt themselves.

<sup>143</sup> School administrators in some states may also face legal restrictions in providing support to sexual minority students—i.e., No Promo Homo laws (McGovern 2012).

Administrators at some schools, however, critically address hegemonic masculinity. In these schools, multiple masculinities are allowed to exist and are equally valued. Male students at these schools do not feel the need to guard hegemonic masculinity by harassing sexual minority men; and if they do, staff quickly intervene. I consider access to social capital in schools that do not critically address hegemonic masculinity (traditional schools) and schools that do (pluralistic schools). I first investigate access to relational capital at traditional and pluralistic schools, and then the pathways between the loss of access to relational, cognitive and structural capital in school.

### **Relational Capital in Traditional and Pluralistic Schools**

Students with access to relational capital feel a strong sense of belonging to the school community and share warm, supportive relationships with students and staff. Education researchers find that relational capital is particularly important in the school setting (Osterman 2000; Voelkl 1997). Students who feel more integrated in their school community tend to engage at higher levels both emotionally and academically (Furrer & Skinner 2003; Voelkl 1995) than students who feel stigmatized because of their sexuality or gender presentation.

Furthermore, students with low access to relational capital tend to experience more mental health problems than those with high levels of capital (Shochet et al. 2006). Education research shows that relational capital predicts academic outcomes (Furrer & Skinner 2003; Voelkl 1995). Pearson and colleagues (2007) posit that hegemonic masculinity in the school setting may explain at least part of the disparity in academic outcomes between sexual minority and heterosexual students. Disengagement from

academic work sometimes occurs as students lose their sense of belonging to the school community (Akerlof & Kranton 2002; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder 2001). Finn (1989) finds that students who lose their sense of belonging to the school community are at higher risk for dropping out of school, even when controlling for past academic performance.

Study men at traditional schools—where hegemonic masculinity formed the boundary between which male students are in and which are out—lost access to relational capital through the “Real Man” narrative employed by male classmates and teachers. In these schools, the “Real Man” narrative was the dominant public narrative, which many gatekeepers (classmates and teachers) adopted. These gatekeepers reacted negatively to men who did not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity (i.e. they were not “real men”), and cut off their access to relational capital through homophobic bullying, social exclusion, unfair discipline, and derisive remarks. Study men at pluralistic schools—where their masculinity was equally valued—did not lose access to relational capital at school. The dominant public narrative at these schools was intersectionality. Students could be both male *and* gay. Most gatekeepers at pluralistic schools accepted study men and took proactive steps to make sure that they were included in the school community.

### Traditional Schools

*Student Narratives.* In schools where hegemonic masculinity is the cultural norm, male students react harshly against their gay classmates. In order to establish their own masculinity—and their place within the school community—male students strictly police gender boundaries. They censure any action that violates the requirements of hegemonic

masculinity, including non-heterosexuality and non-normative gender presentation. The primary narrative that upholds hegemonic masculinity is a “Real Man” narrative.

Students who do not meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity are not considered real men. They are thus subject to contempt. This contempt presents itself most clearly through what some scholars call “low-level” violence (Dupper & Meyer-Adams 2002). Whereas bullying is directed toward a single student or group of students, low-level violence is widespread (Horn, Szalacha & Drill 2008; Nadal & Griffin 2011). Any male student that violates the expectations of hegemonic masculinity—whether he is gay or not—receives the ridicule of his male classmates. Often this ridicule is verbal (Burn 2000; Eliasson, Isaksson & Leflamme 2007; Slaatten & Gabrys 2014).

Terms such as “faggot” and phrases such as “that’s so gay” and “no homo” abound in traditional high schools<sup>144</sup>. These phrases represent contempt in that they portrayed homosexuality as being of less value than heterosexuality. Darien recounts a culture of hearing homophobic name-calling when walking down the hallways of the school: “You know—your class, you’re a fag, or you like to suck dick. It was kind of like, queer folks were lesser.” This widespread contempt made him shut down emotionally at school. He knew that he was not part of the school community, and the best that he could do was not to draw attention to himself: “Some of us who were in the closet were just keeping our heads down and getting out of there. It’s like don’t rock the boat if you don’t have to.”

In many instances, low-level violence turns into bullying when school staff fails to intervene (Rivers 2011). Often, a group of students (bullies) pick a few, male students

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<sup>144</sup> Kosciw and colleagues (2013) find that nearly three fourths of LGBT students (71.4 percent) heard “gay” used in a negative way at school, and 90.8 percent felt distressed because of this language. Black students are slightly more likely than other high school students—57 percent versus 55 percent, respectively.

at the school that they deemed to be “effeminate” and direct abuse towards them (Friedman et al. 2006). Pascoe (2013) notes that homophobic bullying behavior occurs almost exclusively within male peer groups. Through bullying, young men secure their own masculinity by drawing a distinct boundary between their peer group and the student does not embody hegemonic masculinity. Their peer group fits within the school community; the victim of their homophobic bullying does not. Verbal abuse is the most common<sup>145</sup>. Jayden recalls being verbally abused every day during class one year. His bullies called him names associated with the “Real Man” narrative:

I remember it was like yesterday. It was two African American males that just would not let me be alone. Just every day in this class they would just call me names and throw paper at me and distract me and just, you know, it was really bad. I dreaded going to this class. I dreaded going to school. I thought about transferring.

Often, students who are verbally abused are also physically abused (Rivers 2010). Like verbal abuse, homophobic physical abuse is often enacted by a group of males rather than by an individual; and it also involves maintaining the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity (Stoudt 2006). Even more than verbal abuse, physical abuse created in study men an urgency to conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. Terrance had often experienced name-calling for his gender non-conformity while growing up. But when he was struck by a group of male students, he was “put in a corner.” “At that point, I was forced to conform to my peers ideas of how a boys should look and act and do all this stuff.” For Terrance, that conformity included responded to bullies through physical altercations.

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<sup>145</sup> Kosciw and colleagues (2013) find that 74.1 percent of LGBT students had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2 percent because of their gender expression.

Drake experienced physical abuse because he did not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity at his school. Drake grew up in the Southern suburb and moved to an urban neighborhood in the Midwest during middle school. Although hegemonic masculinity was valued at his old school, the expectations were different at his new school where male students were expected to be “tough” and hyper-masculine:

My mannerisms were really proper, it wasn't hood related. It wasn't Black related. So, coming to this new area. To be a male is to be a man is to be hard, you have to listen to rap, you know walk this way, talk this way, do this, do that. That wasn't me. So I kind of learned that I had to conform myself to not be so noticeable if I was going to be gay.

Although he had highly valued academics, the need to conform to hegemonic masculinity transcended this temporarily. The bullying needed to stop. Drake focused less on his schoolwork, so that he would fit into the school's construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Merely witnessing physical bullying caused some men to conform to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. James knew what it was like to be bullied. Students teased him mercilessly in elementary and middle school for his gender non-conformity. In high school, he resolved not to allow the bullying to continue. When he witnessed homophobic bullying at his new high school, he took swift action. He joined the football team in order to “claim his masculinity.” He even gave up a scholarship to a prestigious arts school because he feared it might put him at risk of homophobic bullying:

I got a scholarship to [an arts school]. But the reason I stayed is I wanted to play football. I felt like football was my way to claim my manhood. If I could do football, I was a real guy. But looking back, I think what would it have been like if I had gone to James Baldwin versus staying in my public school? My passion was singing, but I was scared to claim that passion because I thought it was associated with gay boys and being gay.

A handful of men even joined in on bullying, so that they would not become victims. Taking part in homophobic bullying is seen as one sure way for men who are

hiding their sexuality to avoid suspicions that they are gay—and to secure their place within the school community (Sanchez-Villain 2012). Elijah remembers wanting to defend a gay students at his school from bullies. But he couldn't as he too might be perceived as gay. The safest thing for him to do was to join in:

When I was in high school, I was with the group that used to pick on him. People used to talk about him, you know, 'Hey look at the faggot'. I would engage in the conversation. He was very flamboyant. I would basically feed into it. I knew it was wrong. I knew I was gay too. It was me trying to fit in, to get people to not question me as much, to make sure that all eyes were on him.

When he took part in homophobic bullying, Elijah “felt powerless”. He was cut off both from himself and others at school: “I felt like people didn't understand who I was. And even myself, I didn't understand.” Study men like Drake, James and Elijah hoped to secure their place in the school community by conforming to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity—and thus to avoid bullying. Yet they only ended up feeling more alienated from themselves and the school community when they did so.

While some study men responded to bullying by conforming to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, others wished school staff would step in. In traditional schools, this most often does not happen. Without understanding the dynamics that underlie homophobic bullying—maintaining the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity—staff are ill equipped to address the situation<sup>146</sup> (Wernick et al. 2013). Many schools leaders simply do nothing to stem bullying. For a year, Jayden hoped that his teacher or

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<sup>146</sup> Mannheim and Alfano (2010) find that, even if they are supportive of LGBT students, teachers often do not know how to respond to homophobic bullying in the classroom. Almost all high school teachers (85 percent) feel an obligation to create safe environment for LGBT students, yet only 33 percent report intervening when they witness the harassment or bullying of sexual minority students (Kosciw & Diaz 2005). Nearly all principals (98 percent) report that their school or school district has a “safer school” or anti-bullying policy, less than half of anti-harassment/bullying policies specifically address sexual orientation (46 percent) or gender identity or expression (39 percent) (Markow & Danciewicz 2008). Instead, schools tend only to take into account individual instances and not to how the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity play into patterns of bullying (Meyer 2008).



other school leaders would put a stop to the bullying he experienced in class. When they did nothing, he realized that he was on his own: “It was really bad. I complained to the teacher, I told my Mom. Nothing seemed to work. So it was just something that I had to deal with for the entire year.”

Traditional schools that respond to homophobic bullying often do so inadequately. Devin experienced both verbal and physical abuse from his classmates. When the situation became intolerable, he approached the school’s administration to intervene. Instead, they encouraged Devin to be more discreet about his homosexuality—that is, to meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. Bullying was Devin’s problem, not the administration’s or the bullies’. If he was open about his sexuality, he should expect to be harassed; and, if he failed to conform to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity—in this case, by keeping quiet about his sexual orientation—he should find another school:

Teachers stepped in to the extent that they were obligated, but there was no sensitivity to it being because I was gay. There was not sensitivity to that from the staff. They said, ‘If you’re still uncomfortable at the school, you should speak with your parents about different academic options.’ Crazy stuff in hindsight.

Other schools attempt peer mediation between the homophobic bullying and the sexual minority students<sup>147</sup>. Through peer mediation, school staff encouraged the bully and victim to work out their conflict by putting the two on “equal footing” in a mediated conversation. Unfortunately, this method fails to take into account the power dynamics in homophobic bullying, where the bully has more power in the school community (due to their possession of hegemonic masculinity) than the bullying victim (Ybarra, Espelage &

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<sup>147</sup> According to Kosciw and colleagues (2013), 9.8 percent of LGBT students report teachers using peer mediation when they reported bullying.

Mitchell 2014). Tyler recalls the failure of peer mediation: “My teachers made it unsafe to go to school. If I were to go tell a teacher, the teacher would have this sort of peer mediation between the bully and me. And that would only make things worse.”

Both bullying and inadequate responses by school staff severely impact the victim’s sense of belonging at their schools (Birkett, Eseplage & Koenig 2009; Darwich, Hymel & Waterhouse 2012). In schools that value hegemonic masculinity, students who are bullied for not being a “real man” are pariahs within the school community<sup>148</sup>.

Furthermore, most staff either are not prepared or are not willing to intervene. Isaac recalls that bullying in school made him grow up fast. School was his first step into the “cold world” of being openly gay:

Bullying forced me to toughen up, to grow up quickly. I grew up having to fight, to argue with people about me being gay. It hurt, because everybody makes it a big deal. But to a gay person, that’s just like calling me Black, calling me tall, calling me short. It’s just a part of me. People hate me and don’t even know me, just for being me. That made me feel like I lost my innocence, like I had to grow up fast...because I knew it was going to be a cold world after I came out.

Targets of homophobic bullying also tend to lose the male friends that they already have<sup>149</sup>. This only further damages their sense of belonging (access to relational capital) within the school community.

Tyler felt betrayed by classmates whom he considered to be his friends. These friends put their adherence to the demands of hegemonic masculinity above their

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<sup>148</sup> The shift from low-level violence to bullying has a significant impact on the academic outcomes of sexual minority students. Kosciw and colleagues (2013) find that LGBT students who had experienced higher levels of harassment were more likely than those who did not—61.1 percent versus 17.3 percent, respectively. These students also had lower GPAs (2.8 versus 3.3, respectively) and were more likely to report no plan to pursue post-secondary education (8.7 percent versus 4.2 percent, respectively).

<sup>149</sup> Kosciw and Diaz (2005) find that Black students were nearly twice as likely to report being criticized for being “too feminine” or “too masculine” than are White students—38 percent versus 21 percent, respectively. Understanding why Black students experience much higher rates of “gender policing” than White students will be important in addressing the experiences of Black sexual minority men in schools.

friendship. At first, they distanced themselves from Tyler. But bending to peer pressure, they eventually joined in on bullying him for his gender non-conformity at school. Tyler was forced to give up these male friendships inside the school community:

I would question them, why are you being so nasty, why are you being so mean. Right now, why are you doing this. If you ever need help with something, I'll be there. So why are you acting like I'm some stranger on the street, and you're going to abuse me. So I'm like you know what, I can't be around you right now. Low-level violence (name-calling), bullying and the loss of male friendship each rob men of relational capital at school. Whether they are out or hiding their sexuality, study men in traditional schools felt the contempt of their classmates acutely.

*Teacher Narratives.* Sexual minority men in traditional schools face contempt not only from their male peers, but sometimes from staff as well. The narrative that a staff member holds about homosexuality may play a role in how he treats sexual minority students. A staff member who holds negative narratives may feel less responsibility to help sexual minority students (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2009; Schmidt et al. 2012) or may even treat these students poorly himself (Ferfolja 2008). Interestingly, the negative narratives voiced by staff members in traditional schools are very similar to those of students. Many staff members expect male students to meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. When they do not, these they express their contempt through the “Real Man” narrative.

This is especially the case for male athletic coaches and health teachers. The football coach at Tyler’s school regularly made negative comments about gay male students. He believed that gay students were effeminate, and thus deserved to be the “butt of the joke” at school. Tyler recalls one instance when the joking was directed at him:

One teacher would make jokes, you know what I mean. We'd have the dress down day, and one of my teachers would say, ‘You should come to school in the girls’ uniform. That would be so funny. I'd die of laughter.’

And I was like I don't want to do that. He was the football coach as well, so he was super masculine or whatever.

A male teacher made fun of an openly gay student throughout Xavier's first two years of high school. He pointed out the effeminacy of the student, implying that he was less than a real man. This harassment in the classroom made Xavier afraid to come out and nervous about attending the teacher's class in general. The situation worsened when rumors spread that Xavier was involved romantically with another boy at the school. The teacher took advantage on the opportunity, making fun of the relationship in front of the entire class<sup>150</sup>. Xavier was traumatized:

There was this other student in one of my classes that everyone assumed was gay. Every time he wasn't present, the teacher would make fun of him. You know do the limp wrist thing kind of allude to the fact that he was gay, making fun of him being an effeminate male. A particular point in my senior year when rumors about me being involved with another guy began, this same teacher would harass, tease me about that in class, about me being more than friends with this particular guy. Asking about me and this guy in particular ways. That was traumatic to me as a student, having known that he was anti-gay. I became one of those students he would joke about.

It is interesting that the "Real Man" narrative often comes from male instructors whose subject matter was most closely associated with hegemonic masculinity at schools (athletics, health). It seems that in traditional schools, hegemonic masculinity is most closely policed in these male-dominated spaces<sup>151</sup>. The "Real Man" is widely employed not only by male students, but by some male teachers as well.

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<sup>150</sup> This is a case of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment also upholds the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity by "calling out" the deviant sexuality of LGBT students. Unfortunately, schools frequently overlook same-sex sexual harassment (Fineran 2002; Robinson 2005).

<sup>151</sup> Research (GLSEN 2013) finds that in all-male spaces, such as locker rooms, homophobic bullying occurs more frequently than in any other school space. No study, however, has focused on homophobic bullying that comes from male teachers, as opposed to male students.

Other teachers devalue sexual minority male students in more indirect ways. They imply that men did not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity either through oblique comments or unfair punishment. Ms. Johnson had taught all three of Garrett's older brothers, each of whom had been "rough-and-tumble" in comparison to Garrett's softer gender presentation. She asked Garrett how his brothers felt about having someone "like that" in the family. Whether the teacher's condescending remark had to do with Garrett's sexual orientation or gender presentation—or both—is unclear. Either way, the remark made Garrett feel like his masculinity was valued less than that of his brothers<sup>152</sup>.

Teachers may also police the masculinity of sexual minority men through personal discretion. Teachers and administrators enact "personal discretion" against sexual minority students when they use their own prejudice (negative narratives) about homosexuality to punish these students unfairly<sup>153</sup>. When Kendrick<sup>154</sup> wore skinny jeans to school, he was physically bullied by other male students. Kendrick defended himself by fighting back. Rather than intervening on his behalf, Kendrick's principal disciplined him for wearing attire that was "not masculine enough." Because hegemonic masculinity was a core value in the school, Kendrick's gender non-conformity was the problem—not the bullies.

Men who encounter negative narratives from staff members feel betrayed by the very people whom they are supposed to trust. Emotional support from teachers strongly

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<sup>152</sup> This case also shows that not only male educators play a role in policing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.

<sup>153</sup> Kosciw and colleagues (2013) find that the application of personal discretion against sexual minority and gender non-conforming students is common in schools. For instance, more than one third of students (38.9 percent) said that their schools had disciplined LGBT students for public affection that is not similarly disciplined among non-LGBT students, including 28.2 percent who had experienced it personally. In addition, 19.2 percent said they had been prevented from wearing clothing deemed "inappropriate" based on their gender (e.g., a boy wearing a dress); 34.2 percent said this had been true of other students at their school.

<sup>154</sup> At his first high school

predicts a student's sense of belonging in the school community (Rosenfeld, Richman & Bowen 2000; Woolley & Bowen 2007; Pomeroy 1999). Men feel these violations of trust acutely in some traditional schools; however, a small contingent of teachers offers support to LGBT students. These teachers sometimes provide the only support that sexual minority men received in their otherwise unsupportive school communities. Their impact is profound (Cooper et al. 2014; Harper & Singh 2013). In the best cases, supportive teachers at traditional schools are able to create informal "safe spaces" for sexual minority and gender non-conforming students (Ratts et al. 2013; Vega, Crawford & Van Pelt 2012). Ethan's drama teacher created a safe space at his school. Once Ethan came out to her, he was able to find other supportive teachers and students: "I was in all the plays, so we spent a lot of time together. Any of the teachers connected to her automatically knew who I was, they automatically became part of my support network."

Yet, at traditional schools, such safe spaces rarely lead to institutional supports (such as founding a gay-straight alliance) or to wider cultural change (removing the cultural value of hegemonic masculinity). Supportive staff members like Ethan's drama teacher have to work under the radar—or at least without the support of the administration. Advocacy at traditional schools is difficult (Athanases & Larrabee 2003). Teachers fear disapproval from their administration (Bower & Kleck 2009; Dessel 2010; O'Higgins-Norman 2009), the anger of parents and the community (Clark 2010) and even the stigma of being portrayed as gay themselves (Zack, Mannheim & Alfano 2010).

*Double Containment.* Study men at traditional schools were stigmatized not only for their sexuality, but sometimes also for their race. While some men attended schools whose student population was primarily Black, others attended majority White schools.

Majority White schools that place a high value on hegemonic masculinity sometimes place a high value on Whiteness as well<sup>155</sup>.

Already managing the stigma against their Blackness, study men in these schools tended to hide their sexuality. Darien attended a predominantly White high school. His family had trained him to understand the role that racist stereotypes would play in his life as a Black man, and this seemed to be the case at his school. When he realized that he was queer, he accepted his sexuality but decided that he needed to hide it at school. Already battling racist stereotypes, Darien was concerned about balancing another stigma:

As one of the few African American students at the school, I was like I'm already the Black kid. I don't need to be the Black, gay kid. So let's be strategic about how involved I get. You know just dealing with my own issues and my own self-care, because of a lot of the things going on in my life at the time. It was rough in some ways. I was raised with a strong racialized identity. You are very aware of it from a young age. As you get older, you learn more about stereotypes. You just have to figure out how to get through it. I made the early decision that I was queer. But I knew I needed to do what I need to do to get by and get out.

Darien's hiding caused him to be less involved in relationships and activities at school than he might have been and less involved than he was in college when he was open about his sexuality.

William likewise worked hard to conceal his sexuality at his private school. Students never suspected that William was gay, but they constantly made a spectacle of his race. While White students were fascinated to have a Black classmate in middle

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<sup>155</sup> A large body of literature addresses institutional racism in schools. Within schools, cultural factors may disadvantage Black students in comparison to their White peers (Artiles et al. 2002; Tenenbaum & Ruck 2007; Skiba 2001; Welch & Payne 2012). Lewis (2003) explains: "Racially coded ideas and assumptions are a regular part of the school space, both implicitly and explicitly" (p. 53).

school, by high school they counted William as “just one of the darkies.” He needed to prove his classmates’ stereotypes about Black individuals in his community wrong:

I felt the pressure to serve as an example for our entire race. I just kind of took that role on. I just wanted to show that Black people are smart, we're educated, we're very nice and polite. Everything that I saw wrong as a child with our race, I was out to prove different. So I just really worked my ass off to make straight A's. I just felt all of this pressure on me. I became the first Black student president of my high school.

Because students at schools like Williams’ often also hold negative stereotypes about gay people, Black sexual minority students may be hesitant to come out. To be a respectable Black student means to display a respectable sexuality. Where hegemonic masculinity is the norm, the only respectable sexuality is heterosexuality.

Michael, on the other hand, was never given the opportunity to come out. He recalls that at the predominantly White private academy attended, his sexuality never came up because all of the White students were focused on his race. They assumed that because Michael was a large-framed Black man who grew up in urban poverty, he could not possibly be gay:

Sexuality never came up in the school. So my gender performance was never questioned. Being the Black boy in a White school, I guess I was super-masculine already. People thought I had guns, people thought that I was in a gang, people thought that I was on drugs. It was about a whole bunch of other shit, but my sexuality never came up at school, except when White girls were interested in dating me. It was always about other stuff. Gender performance, social performance stuff.

Michael’s classmates enacted sexualized racism, in which Black men are assumed to be hyper-heterosexual. His experience reflects the small amount of research that focuses on Black gay men in schools. Vaught (2004) finds that schools that are not critical in their treatment of racial minority youth impose a hegemonic masculinity on Black youth and force these young men to choose racial solidarity over sexual identity and pass as straight



(also Majied 2010). Intentionally or not, students and teachers frame Black men in these schools through a narrative of sexualized racism (Ferguson 2001). They do not even consider the possibility that Black male students may gay<sup>156</sup> (McCready 2004, 2009).

Traditional schools place a high value on hegemonic masculinity. Both students and teacher apply narratives that male sexual minority students are not real men. Men at these schools often felt as if they did not belong—or as if they had no voice. This was especially the case for Black sexual minority men in predominantly White high schools. With their Blackness made hyper-visible and their sexuality invisible, Darien, William and Michael were “doubly contained” (Hills-Collins 2004).

### Pluralistic Schools

Study men in pluralistic schools fared better. Administrators in pluralistic schools critically address hegemonic masculinity. They train teachers in how to respect sexual minority and gender non-conforming students and how to intervene when students engage in homophobic bullying. And they put institutional supports in place for sexual minority students, including safe spaces and gay-straight alliances. As a result, pluralistic schools foster cultures that are respectful of sexual minority students. Inclusive masculinity<sup>157</sup> replaces hegemonic masculinity. Inclusive masculinity relies on a narrative of intersectionality (as opposed to the “Real Man” narrative of traditional schools). A

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<sup>156</sup> Thus, when schools make efforts to be inclusive of sexual minority students through programming (gay-straight alliances), Black sexual minority students are sometimes left out because they are presumed to be straight by administrators (based on stereotypes) or are excluded from predominantly White groups of LGBT students (McCready 2004, 2009). Craig and colleagues (2014) found that efforts to specifically address the needs of racial minority students within LGBT student groups were successful in increasing their access to relational capital at school.

<sup>157</sup> Much of this research has been conducted in the United Kingdom (Anderson 2011; McCormack 2010, 2011, 2012; McCormack & Anderson 2010), where the social climate towards sexual minorities might be slightly more liberal than in the United States. Still, there may be some communities and schools that practice the inclusive masculinity discussed by McCormack and colleagues (McCormack & Anderson 2014).

student can be male *and* gay or male *and* gender non-conforming and receive the same respect as heterosexual, gender conforming men (i.e. those who would meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity). Whereas sexual minority men are placed outside the boundaries of the school community in traditional schools, they comfortably operate within community boundaries in pluralistic schools; they belong. Unlike men in traditional schools, they enjoy full access to relational capital.

At pluralistic schools, male students in particular tend to be receptive towards sexual minority and gender non-conforming classmates. Because these students need not worry about proving their own masculinity, they are not required to police the gender and sexuality of other male students. The boarding school that Kendrick attended during his final years of high school fostered an incredibly accepting attitude towards LGBT students and staff. As a result, heterosexual male students had relatively little trouble maintaining close friendships with Kendrick and other gay students: “There the straight guys were pretty much really, really cool with people being gay. On a scale of one to ten, I'd say a nine.” The supportive culture at Cameron’s school encouraged him to come out. Cameron made a coming out video on YouTube, which was shared with the entire school community. He received universal support after releasing the video. Male classmates congratulated him, rather than abandoning him as men in traditional schools might have done.

In cases when men engage in homophobic bullying, staff members at pluralistic schools respond swiftly. Education scholars argue that to effectively combat homophobic bullying in schools, schools must work to change the culture of hegemonic masculinity (Mayberry 2006; Payne & Smith 2013). Espelage and Swearer (2010) posit that applying

a social-ecological model to bullying may be especially effective, by focusing on the full range of relationships within the school community (e.g. teacher-student, student-student, teacher-parent) that may be leveraged to end bullying. Through training teachers and students about LGBT issues and putting specific policies in place to address homophobic bullying, administrators at pluralistic schools effectively change the school culture<sup>158</sup>. By involving everybody within the school communities in these efforts—teachers, other staff members, students and parents—they engage the full range of relationships that can be leveraged against bullying. Examples follow.

Anthony recalls how the vice principal acted as a catalyst for culture change in their school. The vice principal contacted a local LGBT organization to implement a school-wide training on sensitivity towards sexual and gender minority students. Many teachers responded enthusiastically, spending unpaid time to undergo the training. After the training these teachers were able to provide “safe spaces” to LGBT students:

Before it was accepting, we really had to educate teachers on LGBT issues, what should be said and what can't be said in classrooms, creating safe spaces for students, student's shouldn't be using the F word [faggot], calling kids gay, teasing or bullying. They would go through a training seminar with the [LGBT organization] and they would become counselors. So there was someone you could talk to, if something came up, if you felt like students were teasing you, you just needed to get some stuff off your chest.

When schools respond effectively to stop bullying, students are confident that they belong within the school community. Anthony felt “incredible support” from his school administration. Even when students made homophobic remarks toward him, he knew that

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<sup>158</sup> Kosciw and Diaz (2005) find that inclusive harassment and bullying policies have benefits for both LGBT and heterosexual students. Fewer students overall report experiencing harassment due to their perceived sexuality or gender (32 percent in schools with inclusive policies versus 43 percent in schools without such policies). Likewise, more students report feeling “very safe” in schools with LGBT-inclusive policies (54 percent versus 36 percent, respectively).

they were in the wrong; he was okay. The shift in his school's culture made homophobic harassment the unacceptable behavior, rather than failing to adhere to the rigid boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.

Furthermore, at pluralistic schools, staff with positive narratives can transform their advocacy of LGBT students into institutionalized support. These supportive staff can develop gay-straight alliances and provide counseling services that specifically meet the needs of LGBT students. Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) are student-led clubs that allow LGBT students and their allies to meet regularly on school grounds. They provide social and emotional support to LGBT students, and help allies to understand how to stand up against homophobic bullying at school (DiFulvio 2011). A large body of research demonstrates the benefits that GSAs provide for the safety and mental health of LGBT students<sup>159</sup> (Heck, Flentje & Cochran 2011; Lee 2002; Russell et al. 2009; Walls, Kane & Wisneski 2010).

When Cameron came out to his favorite teacher—Aunt Gayle—she knew that she needed to resurrect the school's GSA; he needed the support. Because of the supportive administration, Aunt Gayle and Cameron re-established the GSA without the barriers that are often present in traditional schools<sup>160</sup>. Similarly, in Anthony's school, starting a GSA was the “next logical step” after training teachers to provide safe spaces. The

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<sup>159</sup> Using data from the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Goodenow and colleagues (2006) compare the safety of sexual minority youth in 52 schools with and without GSAs. Youth in schools with support groups report significantly lower rates of victimization and suicide attempts. Kosciw and colleagues (2013) find that the presence of GSAs at a school is associated with better outcomes for sexual minority students generally. Students in schools with a GSA are less likely to hear a homophobic slurs (e.g. fag, dyke) used “often” or “frequently” than students in schools without GSAs (57.4 percent versus 71.6 percent, respectively). Fewer students experience higher levels of victimization (e.g. bullying)—19.0 percent versus 36.2 percent. And fewer students are likely to feel “unsafe” at school—46.0 percent versus 64.4 percent. Moreover, teachers in schools with GSA intervene when they heard homophobic remarks more often.

<sup>160</sup> Potential GSA advisors must often fight with unsupportive administration to found a club (Mayo 2013; Valenti & Campbell 2009). Because these advisors do not have as much power within the school as do administrators, GSA clubs often never get off the ground.

administration left this effort primarily up to the students. Anthony took charge. He wanted the club to serve more than just a social function. With the support of an LGBT organization, the students in the GSA took partial responsibility of safe space training for both teachers and students. Wernick and colleagues (2013) explain that such student-led cultural change can be dramatically effective in making schools more supportive of sexual minority students. This was the case at Anthony's school. Over time, the school community became even more accepting of its LGBT students. Anthony gained so much respect for his advocacy work that he was eventually elected student class president.

Staff at pluralistic schools also offer counseling specifically geared towards LGBT students. Research finds that counselors play a critical role in helping LGBT students feel a part of the school community by listening to their concerns, by intervening when students are being ostracized, and by working to change school communities to be more inclusive of LGBT students (Goodrich et al. 2013; Pollock 2006; Singh & Harper 2013). Nevertheless, many high school counselors are not prepared to address the needs of LGBT students<sup>161</sup> (Byrd & Hays 2012; King 2008; Luke, Goodrich & Scarborough 2011). Even when they are, they may face barriers from an unsupportive administration. At pluralistic schools, these barriers do not exist.

A groups of priests at Jesse's Catholic high school worked with him and another friend to start a pastoral care group. These priests were particularly sensitive to the needs of LGBT students. They wanted sexual minority students to know that God loved them and that they had a safe space to talk about their faith and sexuality at school. The administration supported their effort, although the group could not officially be called a

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<sup>161</sup> Only 19.1 percent of school districts nationwide provide funding for LGBT-related mental health services (School Health Policies and Practices Study 2012).

gay-straight alliance. Jesse recalls: “It was very comfortable for us all to meet, we talked about our problems. It was very much a strong group of priests that were very supportive of us.” One day, Jesse decided that it was time for him to come out. The priests assured him: “Regardless of what anyone says, God loves you as much as he loves any person. Never ever put yourself down on something that makes you different from the majority<sup>162</sup>.” Their words gave Jesse a confidence that he had never experienced before. Comfortably out, he felt a deeper sense of connection at school than he had when he was hiding his sexuality.

Supportive counselors are able to counsel men through their experiences in other microsystems as well—especially difficult experiences at home. Cameron felt so comfortable with his school counselor that he was able to talk with her about his father’s abusive response to his coming out. Having counseled other LGBT youth, she knew exactly the steps to take to protect Cameron. She contacted Child Protective Services, in order to move him to a safer home environment. Cameron recalls:

I went to my counselor's multiple times, because they all knew that I was gay. I was really happy to know that she was protective of me, in the sense that your father cannot do this to you. This is one of the safest high schools I could have been at. My Black counselor, she reported the physical abuse. I talked to her about my experiences. She said, ‘The shit that your father has put you through is definitely unacceptable.’ So I had to pack up all of my things, my father and I definitely needed a break.

With his counselor’s help, Cameron was able to escape physical abuse at home<sup>163</sup> and focus more fully on schoolwork. Although an extremely difficult period for him, he was glad that he was able to rely on teachers, counselors and students at school.

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<sup>162</sup> This resembles a narrative of intersectionality, in which Jesse’s non-hegemonic (gay) masculinity was valued just as much as hegemonic masculinity.

<sup>163</sup> He went to live with his mother during the time.

### **Social Capital Pathways**

Study men at traditional and pluralistic schools had vastly different experiences. Men at traditional schools faced homophobic harassment from their peers and contempt-filled remarks from their teachers, while men at pluralistic schools were embraced by their male peers and supported by their teachers and counselors. Schools that critically addressed hegemonic masculinity made school a safe and open community for sexual minority students. Schools that did not reduced study men's access to relational capital by making them feel like they did not fully belong. Their sexuality or gender non-conformity placed them outside the boundaries of the school community. Many of these men lost access not only to relational capital, but also to cognitive and structural capital.

Each form of relational, cognitive and structural capital is listed in Figure 4.1. For the purposes of this study, cognitive social capital refers to: (1) the value placed on academic work and (2) the motivation to complete academic work. Motivation may be influenced directly through the value that a student places on academic work (i.e. students who value academic work more will have greater motivation to complete academic work) (Anderman 2003; Anderman & Kaplan 2008; Goodenow & Grady 1993; Wentzel 1998). Or it may be influenced indirectly through factors such as mental health and a sense of safety within the school community. Students with impaired mental health may still value academic work, but may not have the emotional energy to be motivated in their academic work. Students who do not feel safe at school may value academic work, but may find their motivation in the school community divided between completing academic work and navigating potentially dangerous situations. For instance, they may

avoid these situations by skipping class (where homophobic harassment sometimes occurs) or by confronting these harassment through self-defense.

Cognitive social capital influences academic outcomes through a student's engagement in school. Students who do not value academic work—or whose academic motivation is impaired through depression or fear—do not engage with academic work at the same levels as students who value academic work and have high levels of motivation (Appleton et al. 2006). Students who do not engage in school also have less access to structural capital. In this study, I focus on three forms of structural capital: classroom instruction<sup>164</sup>; teacher and counselor support<sup>165</sup>; and extracurricular involvement<sup>166</sup>. A student might skip class, for instance, if he loses the motivation to attend or if he is afraid because of homophobic harassment.

<i>Figure 4.1. Forms of Social Capital in School</i>		
Relational Capital	Cognitive Capital	Structural Capital
Sense of Belonging	Shared Academic Values/ Academic Motivation	Classroom Instruction Teacher/Counselor Relationships Extracurricular Activities

<sup>164</sup> Research (MacIver & Messel 2013) finds that class attendance is a strong predictor of high school graduation—even more so than suspension and demographic characteristics. Sexual minority students, however, report missing class at much higher rates than their heterosexual peers, often because they feel uncomfortable or unsafe in hostile classrooms. Nearly one third (30.3 percent) of LGBT students have missed class one day in the past year, and one in ten (10.6 percent) have missed four or more days of class (Kosciw et al. 2013).

<sup>165</sup> Teachers may offer additional tutoring outside of normal academic instruction and counselors may provide additional academic assistance to students (i.e. through informing students about scholarships, helping them to apply for college, finding academic opportunities outside the school setting) (Klem & Connell 2004). Many study men in pluralistic schools relied heavily on their counselors for both emotional and academic support.

<sup>166</sup> Through extracurricular involvement (e.g. student government, athletics, speech and debate), students may hone leadership and teamwork skills. These activities may also further integrate students into the school community. Educational research finds that students who are highly involved in extracurricular activities tend to perform better in school (Broh 2002; Fredricks & Eccles 2006; Mahoney & Cairns 1997) and have better mental health outcomes (Eccles et al. 2003; Mahoney et al. 2003). Nevertheless, most LGBT students (61.2 percent) avoid extracurricular activities because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al. 2013).



Study men who lost access to relational capital through the negative reactions of gatekeepers (male peers and teachers) sometimes experience subsequent losses in access to cognitive and structural capital. Impaired cognitive social capital influenced their engagement primarily through indirect means. That is, study men almost universally continued to value academic work even while their ability to engage in academic work was impaired by mental health or threats to their safety within the school community<sup>167</sup>. The indirect means through which the loss of access to relational capital translated to losses in cognitive and structural capital included: depression, fear and fighting back.

*Depression.* In many cases, exclusion within the school community led study men to experience situational depression<sup>168</sup>, which negatively impacted their ability to focus on schoolwork. Poteat and colleagues (2011) find that homophobic harassment significantly predicts impaired mental health outcomes, which in turn is related to lower academic outcomes (also Poteat & Espelage 2007). Garrett felt depressed after experiencing harassment from a teacher in health class. He recalls thinking, ‘I am going to have to deal with this for the rest of my life?’ At this critical point, his drama teacher reached out to him:

She reminded me there's nothing wrong with you. You might face different people in your life who have different opinions, that you know aren't correct. Just kind of take it with a grain of salt. It made me feel a lot better, especially down the road. To think I'm going to put up with this the rest of my life. It's kind of like damn, I'm only like 16. At the same time, when you know you have people like that around you who are going to

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<sup>167</sup> The one exception was Drake. After experiencing homophobic bullying early in high school, Drake tried to avoid such bullying by taking on a persona that met his school community's expectations of hegemonic masculinity. In order to increase relational capital at his school (being accepted by male peers), Drake reduced his cognitive capital (by valuing academic work less). Drake's grades dropped precipitously during his freshman and sophomore years, but recovered after he transferred to another high school later in high school.

<sup>168</sup> That is, depression was directly linked to the experience of homophobic harassment (Meyer 2003; Rosario et al. 2002; Szymanski & Gupta 2009).

constantly be supportive, it makes it easier knowing what you have to deal with.

This encouragement helped Garrett move past this temporary depression. When additional teachers stepped in to encourage him in his academic and extracurricular work, Garrett felt even more confident that he belonged to school community (relational capital) and experienced increased academic motivation (cognitive capital). His grades jumped from a C average during the period after his harassment to a B average later in high school. Furthermore, the extracurricular activities that his teachers encouraged him to pursue (which included audio-visual work) helped Garrett to find his first job after high school (structural capital).

Jarrett had a difficult coming out experience at home, which led him to experience deep depression. In part because of this depression, Jarrett could not motivate himself to take school seriously during his first years of high school (cognitive capital). As a result, Jarrett was in and out of school, missing both classroom instruction and lacking supportive relationships with educators (structural capital). When Jarrett experienced homophobic harassment at school, this was final straw. Already in a vulnerable state, Jarrett dropped out of school, spiraling into an even deeper depression. Things turned around for Jarrett when his friends encouraged him to transfer to a school that was more supportive of LGBT students. At this school, Jarrett met a counselor who supported him both emotionally (relational capital) and academically (structural capital), which—along with his friends—helped him to feel a part of the school community (relational capital).

Before transferring to this school, college “had not been in the plans” for Jarrett. His counselor encouraged Jarrett to pursue a college degree and helped him to take the

steps to apply and secure financial aid (structural capital). Today, Jarrett is in college, a year away from obtaining a Bachelor's degree. Because of his negative experience at his earlier high school (relational capital), Jarrett may not have even trusted his counselors at that school enough to seek this help (structural capital).

*Fear.* Research finds that students who do not feel safe at school not only suffer in terms of relational social capital but may also experience impaired academic motivation and engagement (Toomey, McGuire & Russell 2012). Black, LGBT and low-income students are the least likely to feel “very safe” according to national studies (Kosciw & Diaz 2005; Kosciw et al. 2013), which suggests that Black sexual minority men—especially those attending schools in low-income neighborhoods—may be at particular risk of fear interfering with their academic work. Students who live in fear of homophobic bullying may be hindered from developing relationships with their classmates and educators (relational capital). Sometimes, students must actively avoid certain classmates and educators for their own protection. In some cases, this includes skipping classes where homophobic bullying is especially intense (structural capital). Furthermore, students who must worry about avoiding dangerous situations within the school setting may have their attention diverted from their academic work to ensuring their own safety (cognitive capital). These students do not value academic work less than other students, but they are not able to focus on academic work to the same degree as students who do not experience harassment or bullying.

When Jayden experienced bullying in the classroom, he experienced a heavy tension. Jayden was a high-achieving student and wanted to give his full attention to learning, but he dreaded going to class because he knew that he would face harassment

and humiliation. While many students in his situation might have responded by avoiding the situation altogether—i.e., by skipping class—Jayden did not. In this way Jayden maintained structural capital (classroom instruction), while experiencing a loss in cognitive capital (attention diverted from academic work to responding to bullying). He was able to pass the class with a high grade, but experienced a great deal of stress along the way.

Devin experienced similar homophobic harassment inside and outside the classroom. As in Jayden's school, administrators responded poorly. Experiencing the tension between wanting to succeed in the classroom and wanting to avoid bullies, Devin chose to avoid the situation by not attending class. He eventually dropped out of school, because he "needed to be out of the negative environment" (structural capital). Devin earned his G.E.D. shortly after dropping out and wanted to attend college, yet his negative experience in high school traumatized him to the point that he almost did not pursue further education (cognitive capital): "I didn't start school partially because I was afraid to go back into an academic setting and deal with some of the same things that I was dealing with in high school." At this point, however, Devin met a mentor who encouraged him to attend a community college and later to pursue a four-year degree (structural capital).

When he experienced harassment from his teacher for a rumor that he was dating another male student, Xavier eventually skipped that class (structural capital) because the "stress was just too much" along with difficult circumstances in coming out at home. The thought of attending the class brought a sense of dread and panic. If other educators had not stepped in to offer their support to Xavier, he may have felt increasingly isolated

within the school community (relational capital). Xavier's debate and tennis coaches helped to counteract the negative narratives that he experienced from other teachers:

I did have a teacher that was very supportive. One of the first teachers I came out to was a coach of mine. My debate coach, she was very supportive in terms of affirming me, be who you are, do what makes you happy. She was somebody that I could talk with about my relationship problems, how others are treating me at school. She was really that mentor, a supporting ear to listen about whatever I was going through. When I came out to my mother, she really supported me through that time...And my tennis coach, he always asked how I was doing, how my boyfriend was doing in front of the entire team. He modeled that support for the whole team showing that my sexuality was accepted there.

These coaches not only helped Xavier feel a part of the community through their own actions, but also modeled what a supportive school culture would look like by encouraging fellow students to accept their sexual minority peers (relational capital). In a small way, they were able to promote a culture of inclusive masculinity within their traditional school. As a result, fear did not mark all of Xavier's relationships with teachers. Skipping class was limited only to the one in which he experienced homophobic bullying.

*Fighting Back.* The academic engagement of some study men was diverted by the need to fight back against their homophobic bullies. Research indicates that fighting back often occurs either after a student has lost his sense of belongingness to the school community or out of fear of losing that belonging (relational capital). Panfil (2014) and Johnson (2008) demonstrate that in school cultures where hegemonic masculinity is defended most rigidly, sexual minority men must fight back against homophobic harassment if they are to survive within the school community. Failing to defend themselves invites further disrespect, after which harassment will increase. Isaac recalls fighting to earn respect after being verbally harassed at his new school:

Most of the fights would just happen because it would get to the point where—when you're a male especially, it's a question of dominance. Who's the most masculine male? You know, dick-swinging competitions. People would say smart remarks. In gym one day, people said, 'You know he's gay, he's going to look at you.' Somebody called me a faggot. Just because people view me as a feminine man... You know I grew up with a really rough childhood, in a really rough area of town. They didn't know what they were coming up against. I was like I don't care what you think about me being gay, but you are not going to disrespect me. So I got into a fight.

When teachers do not understand the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity and homophobic bullying in their schools, they are not able to intervene on the behalf of bullied students. Instead, both participants in a fight incited by homophobic bullying receive equal blame. Study men who were blamed for their victimization not only lost structural capital through out-of-school suspensions, but also felt further isolated from the teachers who did not understand their situation (relational capital).

In many cases, sexual minority students who fight back already have suppressed access to relational capital in school communities that have stigmatized them for failing to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity (Stewart 2003). This was the case for Clayton. Overwhelmed by the pressures of figuring out his own sexuality along with the negative narratives (“Real Man”) that he was experiencing at school, he snapped:

Going back to that breaking point, I think I was just so tired of dealing with it. I was exhausted of dealing with why am I this way, why is this happening to me, praying to God. I never prayed to God to change me. But why did I have to be this way, why can't I be like everyone else. I think that's what was frustrating me so much. I don't understand, I don't understand why this has to happen to me.

Clayton received an out-of-school suspension for standing up to his bullies. This was a critical point for Clayton, as he could easily have continued to drift from the school community that did not support him (relational capital) or even have severed ties

altogether by dropping out (structural capital). Clayton's English teacher, however, helped him understand that he did not deserve the bullying that he had received, and he "was not all of those terrible things that the homophobic bullies were calling him." As a result, the fight did act as a turning point for Clayton—but a positive rather than a negative one. Clayton was able to look beyond the negativity of his high school's culture towards the hope for more acceptance in college. Clayton remembers his English teacher as a "saving grace" during this critical time. Although Clayton avoided dropping out of high school, he was still not as involved in extracurricular activities as he might have been if he was more integrated into the school community (structural capital). When Clayton did enter a supportive environment in college, his leadership abilities seeded and he founded an organization for LGBT students of color.

### **Conclusion**

In traditional schools, hegemonic masculinity forms the boundary between which men are inside and which are outside the school community. Not meeting the expectations of hegemonic masculinity—because of their sexual orientation—sexual minority men find themselves on the outside. As gatekeepers, male peers and teachers police the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity through the "Real Man" narrative, attacking the masculinity of study men in direct and subtle ways. Subject to this contempt, men in traditional schools lose access to social capital in a number of ways. Outside the boundaries of the school community they are robbed of access to relational capital (i.e. their sense of belonging at school was impaired). Stigmatized by their peers and teachers, they experience depression, fear and the need to fight back. Although they rarely devalue academics, they lose access to cognitive capital as they are forced to divert

their attention away from academic work to dealing with harassment. They lose structural capital when they respond to harassment by avoiding class, engaging in teacher relationships or taking part in extracurricular activities that would have enriched their academic experience.

In pluralistic schools, administrators take steps to dismantle the boundary of hegemonic masculinity. They seek training for teachers, encourage institutional supports (such as gay-straight alliances and LGBT-specific counseling services) and quickly intervene when sexual minority students experience homophobic harassment. Sexual minority men at these schools have full access to relational capital. Accepted by their male peers and teachers, they do not experience the depression, fear or need to fight back that men in traditional schools do. They can focus on the academic work without distraction and had no hesitation in approaching teachers for academic and emotional help. Thus they have full access to cognitive and structural capital in school as well.



## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **UNDER PRESSURE: PARENT REACTIONS, COMMUNITY PRESSURE AND CAPITAL LOSS**

Parents play a critical role in identity development of adolescents (Elizur & Ziv 2001; Floyd et al. 1999) and in providing them the material and non-material supports they need to succeed in school. In this chapter, I consider study men's access to social capital in their families. Young people who share a warm, supportive relationship with their parents have a high level of relational capital. Although much research on youth's coming out experience is individually focused, several studies indicate that coming out affects the entire family microsystem. A child's coming out may cause a crisis by disrupting family boundaries and values (Crosbie-Burnett et al. 1996). Parents may initially experience several, emotional reactions at once (Savin-Williams 2001; Willoughby and Malik 2006). Parents may experience anger, denial, disgust, or may simply not know how to react. Although most parents do not wish to hurt their children, negative or ambivalent reactions to their child's coming out may—if only temporarily—reduce their child's access to relational capital at home.

Research finds that the warmth of the parent-child relationship after coming out significantly predicts youth outcomes (Ryan et al. 2009, 2010; Pearson & Wilkinson 2013). Children who lose access to relational capital through a strained parent relationship fare worse in terms of mental health (Armsden & Greenberg 1987; Brumariu & Kerns 2010; Brenning et al. 2012; Floyd et al. 1999; Wong & Tang 2004) and physical health (Needham & Austin 2010; Vincke et al. 1993). Ryan and colleagues (2009), for instance, find that higher rates of family rejection are significantly associated with poorer

health outcomes of lesbian and gay young adults. Sexual minority young adults who report higher levels of family rejection during adolescence are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 more times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more to have engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection. Youth who maintain warm relationships with their parents after coming out, on the other hand, have high self-esteem (Nungesser, 1983; Savin-Williams, 1989) and are less likely to attempt suicide (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006).

Parents of study men reacted in diverse ways when their son came out. These reactions relied in part on parent's prior narratives<sup>169</sup> about homosexuality. As gatekeepers, they shaped the access to social capital that men had at home. When a parent reacted poorly to his or her son's coming out, the parent-child relationship was disrupted for a time. In some cases parents were not be able to communicate effectively with their son because of their anger or distress about his sexuality. In other cases, study men avoided interacting with their parents because they perceived this anger or distress as rejection. In extreme cases, parents were so upset that they pushed their son out of the house. In each of these cases, study men lost access to relational capital at home. The warm relationship that they once shared with their parents grew cold and distant.

Study men who experienced disrupted relationships with their parents sometimes also experienced losses in cognitive capital (when men who were depressed from a parent's poor reaction did not have the mental resources to succeed in school) and structural capital (when men no longer communicated with their parents about school or

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<sup>169</sup> Although the sources from which parents draw from public narratives to form their individual narratives about homosexuality is not the focus of this study, these sources often included their churches and communities.

lost access to material resources after being pushed out of the home). Nevertheless, access to social capital generally rebounded over a period of weeks, months, or in some cases, years.

In most cases, parents eventually came to accept their son's sexuality, and their relationship was restored. Men regained access to relational, cognitive and structural capital. Still, the lack of access to capital during the difficult period after coming out put men's academic success at peril. In a minority of cases, the relationships between study men and their parents did not improve after they came out—or reconciliation took many years. In all of these cases, parents faced intense pressure either from within their churches or communities. This social pressure prevented parents of study men from shifting towards a positive narrative about their son's sexuality.

### **Reactions Patterns and Relational Capital**

Parents of study men exhibited six primary response patterns when their child came out, depicted in Figure 5.1. These response patterns arose in part from the narratives that parents held about homosexuality prior to their son's coming out, as well as community pressure to maintain negative narratives (in the case of right-wing authoritarianism and Real Man responses). For each response pattern, the duration of the rift between parents and their sons varied. During this time, men lost access to relational capital at home. Generally, study men whose parents responded positively to their coming out experienced no reduction in relational capital; men whose parents responded primarily with fear for their double minority status experienced short term<sup>170</sup> reductions in capital; men whose parents responded with Biblical inerrancy or concerned

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<sup>170</sup> Generally, one to six months

authoritarianism experienced medium term<sup>171</sup> reductions in capital; and men whose parents relied on right-wing authoritarianism or real man narratives experienced long-term<sup>172</sup> reductions in capital.

<i>Figure 5.1. Reaction Type by Reduction in Access to Relational Capital</i>			
No Reduction	Short-Term Reduction	Medium-Term Reduction	Long-Term Reduction
Positive	Fear	Inerrancy Concerned Authoritarianism	Right Wing Authoritarianism Real Man

*Support.* Study men whose parents reacted positively to their son’s sexuality experienced no loss of relational capital at home. These parents had voiced positive narratives about homosexuality, which encouraged their child to come out. Coming out strengthened the parent-child relationship, rather than weakening it. Honesty opened the line of communication between parents and study men to talk about relationships, health and school. These study men often found home a refuge of support against the homophobic harassment they experienced at school and church.

Tyler’s mother, a nurse who cared for HIV-positive patients, brought up the topic of homosexuality often with her son when he was young. She suspected that Tyler might be gay and she wanted him to know that she fully supported him<sup>173</sup>. Confident that he would be accepted, Tyler came out to her when he was in late grade school: “I felt like there was a big weight off my shoulders, a big pressure off my shoulders. It really stems from the relationship I had with her.” Tyler and his mother continued to engage in dialogue about his sexuality—his experiences in coming out to friends, the boys in whom he was interested, and the homophobic harassment that he sometimes experienced. These

<sup>171</sup> Generally, six months to two years

<sup>172</sup> Generally, more than two years

<sup>173</sup> She employed a “Born this Way” narrative.

after-school conversations helped Tyler manage the experience of being gay in a largely unsupportive school. Home was a safe space. When talking with his mother, his worries vanished: “Once I got home, it would all go away.”

Garrett’s family, on the other hand, did not talk about homosexuality often when he was growing up, but his mother had close gay friends. Based on her friendships, Garrett assumed that she would support him if he came out. He was right. When Garrett came out, his mother assured him that he was “made perfect” (“Born this Way” narrative) and that she loved him the same. Furthermore, whereas Garrett and his parents did not talk about personal matters such as sexuality when he was young, his coming out allowed them to communicate more openly. Garrett relied heavily on his parents support when his health teacher harassed him. Embarrassed, he told his father what had happened after school. His father was irate. He contacted the school administration immediately and made sure that the teacher would treat Garrett respectfully in the future.

*Fear.* Some parents did not hold malicious narratives about gay people—that they are outside the natural order or are threats to the community—but they associated being gay with being at risk. These reactions most closely resemble the “Plight of the Black Man” narrative. Parents who held these narratives were fearful—and often grief-stricken—when their son came out. Study men sometimes took this emotional reaction as a sign of rejection and the parent-child relationship was strained. This reaction often turned around when a parent learned more about gay people and their ability to succeed both in society and in Black communities.

Some parents worried specifically that being gay would only be one more stigma that their Black sons would have to face in society. Murray and colleagues (2001) find

that Black parents' worries about the "double minority" status of their gay child play a key mediating role in their initial reaction to his coming out. Anthony's mother gave up the negative narratives about gay people that she heard in church, yet she could not let go of the fear that being gay would cause her son greater discrimination. It was enough that Anthony was Black and male. Now he had "three strikes" against him:

After all of that happened, my Mom was like you know I love you, nothing can change that, but I need you to understand that you were born with two strikes against you. And I was like 'Oh God' we are having this conversation again. Because growing up African American, mothers tell their son at 7 or 8, you can't do what your counterparts can do, you can't move the same way your counterparts can move. And that was kind of disheartening, because at 7 or 8 you see the world as completely innocent, and you're completely innocent. But they take your innocence away because you have to deal with reality. Around 15, my Mom was like you have to realize now you are living with this third strike. Any new thing can mean that I lose my son. Any little thing can mean that you're judged harshly, or people are not going to welcome you. You're Black, you're male, and now you're willing to live your life openly. And you're going to have discrimination at every front. And I didn't really pay attention, because I hadn't really been discriminated against at any point up until then. I'm the same person, but now you're telling me this. What changes today that wasn't the same yesterday.

Anthony struggled with his mother's reaction and their relationship grew distant. Soon, however, he came to realize that his mother was correct, in part: "Now I get it. Not only am I gay, but I'm Black. I'm looked at as less than human." With the support of his school, Anthony took control of his situation. His Mom began to see that, with the right support, her son could succeed in society as a Black gay man. If it had not been for Anthony's incredibly supportive school environment, this change in perspective may not have occurred. His experience shows that a positive experience in one microsystem (school, in this case) can affect positive change in another.

*Biblical Inerrancy.* Parents who were highly involved in church communities often responded with “you know what the Bible say” when their son came out. A response of Biblical inerrancy typically involves three narratives. First, parents hold an inerrant view of the Bible. They believe that everything written within the Bible should be obeyed. Second, they believe that homosexuality is outside the natural order. They base this belief on scriptures such as Leviticus 18:22 (which calls male same-sex sexual acts an “abomination”) and Romans 1:26-27 (which calls male same-sex sexual acts “unnatural”). Third, they believe in a dualistic universe, in which believers go to heaven and non-believers (a group that perhaps included gay people) are at risk of going to hell<sup>174</sup>.

Parents who react with Biblical inerrancy are not so much disgusted with their sons when they came out as they are fearful for their son’s eternal future. They hate his homosexuality because it puts him at risk of damnation (hell), but love him deeply (“Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin” narrative). Study men did not experience this distinction. When parents rejected their sexuality, men generally felt rejected in their entire personhood. This caused tension in parent-child relationships. Nevertheless, in almost every case when parents responded with Biblical inerrancy, they eventually adopted a positive narrative about their son’s sexuality. As parents opened up to accepting their son’s sexuality, emotional warmth once again characterized their relationship and men’s access to relational capital was restored.

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<sup>174</sup> They may base this belief on certain translations of 1 Corinthians 6:9 (New American Standard Version): “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

For Christopher's mother, this change came through maintaining a close relationship with her son despite her initial disapproval of his sexuality. When she discovered that Christopher was gay—after overhearing his call with another male student—she reminded him that the Bible does not approve of homosexuality. Christopher took this message to heart, and tried to change his sexuality. When he finally accepted himself, he wanted to convince his mother that there was a different way to interpret the Bible's passages about homosexuality. Each time he tried to talk with his mother, however, her religious “red flags” went up:

After I came out, we had those difficult and courageous conversations. She was very negative and accusatory. Oh you know, you're going to hell. This is an abomination. I would send her different biblical explanations of disproving certain verses like Leviticus 18:22, different more liberal interpretations of Christianity and the Bible. She would send back nasty e-mails.

Things changed over time, however, both as Christopher's mother saw the positive changes in her son as he embraced his sexuality and as she grew disillusioned with her church's handling of some morality issues (including homosexuality). Christopher's mother saw that he was happy and more stable than he had been previously. She got to know Christopher's boyfriend and other Black gay friends as well. She “saw the humanity in them” and her previous condemnation of homosexuality based on interpretations of verses such as Leviticus 18:22 began to fade away. Today, she is a strong ally to Christopher and his gay friends.

Jamal's grandfather changed his view about sexuality through his personal reflection on Scripture. When Jamal came out in high school, his grandparents strongly believed that he could change his orientation. The narratives that they had heard about homosexuality in church were that homosexuality was not unnatural and that gay people



could become straight. They took Jamal to reparative therapy. This was a difficult time for both Jamal and his grandparents, and they talked very little for the entire year. When Jamal finally gave up on therapy, they worried for him. Not only would their religious community not accept Jamal if they knew he was gay, God might reject him as well. As his grandfather reflected more on the Bible, however, he realized that this was not the case. God loved Jamal, not in spite of his sexuality but because of it. God made Jamal gay:

A year later, my grandfather was talking to me and he would always ask God how to understand who I was as a person meaning how to understand because I'm gay. Basically he said that God told him to, "Just accept him for who he is," so I finally feel like my grandparents accept me for who I am as a person and my sexuality.

Today, Jamal shares an even closer relationship with his grandparents than he had before, because he no longer feels the need to hide: "Everybody can be happy and be comfortable now. I honestly don't want to hide anything from anybody now." They meet Jamal's boyfriends and regularly ask about his work in the LGBT community. Furthermore, because Jamal's grandparents are so well respected in their church, they have ensured that others will at least respect Jamal. The experience of Jamal's family shows that even within an inerrant view of the Bible, parents can come to a place where they fully affirm their gay children. Sometimes, the Bible can even be the source of change.

Other parents who rejected their child's sexuality because of an inerrant view of the Bible still hold a traditional interpretation about homosexuality (that homosexuality is a sin) with which they wrestle. Initially, these parents reacted especially harshly. They quoted scriptures that condemned homosexuality. Over time, however, they opened up to reconsideration. Austin tried to come out his freshman year of high school. Mature for his

age, he planned out a conversation that would address how he realized he was gay and how he was trying to reconcile his religious views with his sexuality. This was a failed attempt, however. Austin's parents immediately cut off the conversations and began to quote Scriptures they believed to condemn homosexuality:

They whipped out the Bible and started quoting the verses that condemned people who were gay, and how they were going to hell. They said it wasn't the right lifestyle choice that I was making, that it was a phase, that it wouldn't last forever<sup>175</sup>.

His parents' strict interpretation of the Bible allowed no room for dialogue. Things changed, however, when Austin's mother separated from his father. The difficult experience of separation, along with time and more exposure to gay people in the media, opened up the possibility of dialogue<sup>176</sup> between Austin and his mother. This is an ongoing process. She now shares a warm relationship with Austin and his gay friends, but is not at the point of affirming same-sex relationships. Her openness and warmth mean a great deal to Austin, and he has regained access to some of the relational capital that was lost at home.

The cases of Christopher, Jamal and Austin each show that—in the absence of intense community pressure—the reaction of Biblical inerrancy rarely disrupts parent-child relationships on a permanent basis. The “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin” (in which gatekeepers maintain some level of disgust towards a sexual minority person) typically does not hold up in the face of parental love. Still, each of these men did lose access to relational capital for a significant portion of their high school experience, and recovery sometimes did not occur until college.

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<sup>175</sup> “You Can Change” narrative

<sup>176</sup> As with homosexuality, divorce was not viewed favorably in her religious tradition's interpretation of the Bible.

*Concerned Authoritarianism.* Other parents enacted a concerned authoritarianism in response to their son's coming out. These men experienced slightly longer reductions in relational capital—that were often more severe—than men whose parents reacted in fear or inerrancy. Research finds that though authoritative parenting is most helpful for children from middle-class backgrounds, authoritarian parenting may be adaptive and necessary in low-income neighborhoods (Hill 2001). These neighborhoods contain disproportionate rates of violence and risk for involvement with law enforcement<sup>177</sup>. Thus some mothers adopt an authoritarian parenting style that helps their children to stay out of physical danger and trouble.

When these mothers hold a negative narrative about homosexuality—particularly when homosexuality is seen as a danger to physical (“Plight of Black Men” narrative) or spiritual health (narrative of personal destruction)—they may apply authoritarian parenting practices to help their child avoid anything related with homosexuality. These mothers may feel at a loss when their child accepts his sexual identity and pursues a same-sex relationship. Some mothers of study men, for instance, did not even have the words to voice their feelings when they came out. Bratton (2013) notes that mothers in poor, urban areas feel that the one thing they have control is their child. When they are not able to steer their child away from homosexuality, mothers may temporarily lose their sense of efficacy in parenting. In extreme cases, they may push their child out of the house. Homelessness as a result of concerned authoritarianism, however, tends to be short-term. During this time, mothers are conflicted. They want to do the best they can

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<sup>177</sup>For a discussion of disproportionate policing in low-income neighborhoods, see Alexander (2010) and Wacquant (2001).

for their sexual minority child, yet they were at a loss with how to deal with his homosexuality.

Jarrett's mother seemed to react well to his coming out. She assured Jarrett that she would always love him, although she didn't approve of homosexuality. Things were okay as long as Jarrett shared his mother's view of homosexuality and "did not bring it into the house." Their relationship quickly strained, when he became confident in his sexuality and developed relationships with other gay friends. Jarrett's mother engaged in regular arguments with him and threatened to kick him out of the house. Eventually she did. For a period of time, Jarrett's mom went through cycles of anger at his being openly gay. She would "lash out" at him, put him out of the house and a few days later would tell him to come back home:

When I would go to these friends, I would go for three or four days, and then she would call me and say things like, it's time to come home. I'm guessing it was just an emotional rollercoaster for her at that time. She would put me out, and then a few days would pass and she would calm down and get to reality.

This was an extremely difficult period for both Jarrett and his mother. The two had shared an extremely close relationship. Eventually, Jarrett's mother came to accept his sexuality to a degree, but the loss in relational capital had severe repercussions for his academic performance in high school:

I was extremely depressed. It's one thing for an individual out on the street not to like you for being gay. But it's a different story when it's family. Because I've always been close knit with my family, period. When that started happening, I became extremely distraught. Depression just hung over me. I didn't want to go to school. I was like you're not going to make me go to school. When I look back on it, it was poor decisions on my behalf.

Jonathan likewise shared a close relationship with his mother, but she grew increasingly distant after he came out. One day he confronted her. The two had “a huge blowup” and she hit him in frustration. She quickly apologized, and the two sat down to talk. She confessed that she was completely at a loss about how to raise a gay child. The only things that she had heard about gay people were negative—that all gay people would contract HIV and that they were destined for hell. She could not allow Jonathan to walk down this path. Desperately wanting to know how to help, she ended the conversation with a question: “What do you need from me?” Jonathan mentioned that he needed to see a therapist. Although she had few material resources, his mother made it happen: “Two weeks later I was sitting in a therapist's chair. That's one thing about my mother. She responded very well to my needs.”

The counselor played a pivotal role in Jonathan's life. He encouraged him to pursue a college degree, and was the first Black man to accept Jonathan as a gay man:

That was pivotal for me. It helped a ton that he was supportive of my sexuality. Seeing him, a successful Black man, kind of validated all of my aspirations, all of my dreams of going to college, getting my degrees, and becoming a successful professional. I was the first person on my mother's side to pursue a higher degree.

Over time, the therapist also helped Jonathan's mother to learn more about homosexuality and to embrace her son. The case of Jonathan's mother shows that even within concerned authoritarianism—in which parents are at a loss on how to guide and protect their gay children—they may provide their children with the resources that they need. Yet access to resources is necessary. Because these mothers are often from low-income backgrounds, they often may have limited access to online or organizational resources about LGBT people. Although these mothers eventually re-established warm

relationships with their son, access to information about homosexuality might have lightened their struggle and stemmed the severity and duration of social capital loss for their son.

Although most study men experienced some tension with their parents after coming out, as parents grew more comfortable with their child's sexuality this tension eased. Men regained access to relational capital as they once again felt close to their parents. In some cases, though, parents either were never able to accept their children or took years to do so. These parents faced extreme pressure either from their religious (right-wing authoritarianism response) or their racial communities ("Real Man" response).

*Right Wing Authoritarianism.* In many ways, parents of study men who responded with right-wing authoritarianism were similar to those who responded with Biblical inerrancy. Both attended church frequently—often one or more times per week. And both believed that the Bible is without error in its teaching for people living today. Yet parents who responded with inerrancy often changed from a negative to a positive narrative about their son's sexuality—although this took varying amounts of time—and the parent-child relationship improved. Parents who responded with right-wing authoritarianism did not change, and their sons lost access to relational capital for a much longer period of time.

Right-wing authoritarianism combines conservative values—i.e., narratives that homosexuality is outside the natural order or against the community—with strong devotion to a religious figure or figures—i.e. a leader who speaks against homosexuality. Researchers find that right-wing authoritarianism provides a link between inerrant views of the Bible and prejudice towards LGBT people (Laythe et al. 2002). That is, without

religious leaders railing against homosexuality, even people who believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality are less likely to hold personal animus against sexual minorities. As I will discuss in the next chapter, leaders of some religious communities frequently speak against homosexuality in order to maintain the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. Parents who stay involved in these churches have a much harder time accepting their children<sup>178</sup>.

Marcus' parents pastored an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in North Carolina that held a strongly negative view of homosexuality<sup>179</sup>. They played a key role in excluding same-sex couples from the church community. Marcus specifically remembers traveling with his father to notarize the church by-laws, which stated that the church would not perform gay marriages. When Marcus' parents spoke of gay congregants, they did so disparagingly. This served as a signal for Marcus not to come out:

Some of the gay people they know are in situations of men in the church left his wife for a man. To see their reaction was like, whoa yeah, maybe you should stay in place and don't say anything. Even with new information out there, they have kept that stereotype, that stigma embedded in their minds. They make comments still, about gay people. In my mind I said, 'You've got your gay son.' I wish I could say what I had wanted to say.

He worried that—just as gay congregants were excluded from church—he would be kicked out of his home. Marcus believes his parents suspected his homosexuality, but neither he nor his parents speak about it. Since high school, Marcus and his parents have

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<sup>178</sup> The pressure may be either community based or based on psychological factors. For instance parents in communities where racial discrimination is intense may rely on the support of their church community. On the other hand, some people have a greater need for certainty and hierarchy, and may rely on authoritarian church communities to fill this need (Van Hiel et al. 2010).

<sup>179</sup> This is at odds with the views of many African Methodist Episcopal church attendees in the United States, many of whom accept sexual minority people.

not shared a close relationship. Because of their role in upholding right-wing authoritarianism—i.e. enforcing narratives about gay people—Marcus’ parents cannot accept their son.

Religious leaders who espoused right-wing authoritarianism impacted the parents of some study men. Kendrick’s father was highly involved in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), attending church on a regular basis and even traveling every year to the national convention. Following leaders within the denomination, Kendrick’s father regularly referred to gay people as falling outside the natural order. When Kendrick came out to him, he had a tirade. Kendrick’s father apologized for his emotional outburst, but not for his viewpoint. He still believed that gay people were abominations and he continued to voice his disapproval of homosexuality in front of his son. Kendrick remembers attending a COGIC convention, where his father “clapped” and “nodded” pointedly when the topic of homosexuality came up:

I would get annoyed, because along with it my Dad would start clapping and nodding his head, agreeing with, knowing that I was like that. Like what about the other stuff that he said, you weren't nodding and clapping your hands to that.

Men whose parents were influenced by right-wing authoritarianism lost a great deal of relational capital at home when they came out. Still, unlike men whose parents reacted with a “Real Man” narrative, none were pushed out of their homes.

*Real Man.* Some parents (mostly fathers) combined a “Real Man” narrative with an authoritarian parenting style to declare that their son would not be gay<sup>180</sup>. The “Real Man” narrative in this case includes aspects of both contempt and disgust. Gay men do

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<sup>180</sup> Bebes and colleagues (2013) find that children whose parents exert more authoritarian control over their beliefs about sexuality tend to fare worse psychologically. This is especially the case for gay children (Roach 1988).



not meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity upheld by some members of the Black community, and are thus objects of contempt. Homosexuality also violates the natural order and elicits disgust. Even when these parents did not kick their sons out of the house, their reaction was sometimes so toxic that sons were forced to leave for a time. Cameron's father, an immigrant from the Barbados, combined narratives of contempt and disgust when he discovered that his son was gay:

He said, 'You're such a disgrace to this family. Oh my gosh, you're going to become a perv when you get older, oh my gosh you're going to go to jail.' My father was from Barbados. As you know, in those countries, they're really not affirming at all. So I sort of knew how he would react, but I didn't know he would react as harshly as he did. Basically I was physically, mentally and verbally abused by my father. The relationship between my father and me got worse and worse. Something had to stop.

Cameron moved out for five months after his teacher contacted Child Protective Services. Things seemed to improve when he returned. His father still loved him. Yet, when his father discovered that Cameron had published his coming out story in the school yearbook, he blew up again. He could not accept his son's sexuality, and their relationship remained strained.

Unlike the right-wing authoritarianism response, parents who employ a "Real Man" response are not motivated by adherence to religious communities. Rather they worry that they might be rejected by their community for having raised a gay child. With their masculinity in question, fathers in particular may fear experiencing the same contempt that they have witnessed sexual minority people receiving within their communities (Solebello & Elliot 2011). Jarrett's father, who was well-known in his local community, not only avoided telling others in the community about his son's sexuality, but he also completely erased his son from his life when he learned Jarrett was gay. He

did not return Jarrett's calls for two years. This rupture happened suddenly, and came as a great shock to Jarrett, who previously shared a close relationship with his father:

Every time I called, he went two years without calling me, without texting me. At that point, I was 17. It was so hard. Because I went from coming out the womb to 17 always having my Dad around. Then having that drastic change, not being able to be there with him. My Dad and I were extremely close, before I had told him. After I told him, he basically vanished. He's really sociable in the Black community, people came up to him and were like, hey I heard about your son. That hurt him as well, because he didn't know what to say. I would always tell him, you don't have to say my son is gay. If they asked him if his son plays football, just say no; but he does have a 4.0. He is the SGA president. Dad, just because I am this way, this does not dictate where I am going in this life. I am still the same person before and after. It hasn't changed me. The only person that's changing is you.

Even though Jarrett's father had much to be proud of (his son had a 4.0 GPA and was the student body president), he could not bring himself to mention his son within the community. Having raised a gay son overshadowed everything else<sup>181</sup>.

Sometimes mothers also feel the pressure that they too would be looked down upon for raising a gay son. Isaac left a coming out letter to his mother. While he did not anticipate her approval of homosexuality, he at least expected her support. Instead, his mother reacted in anger, saying that she hated it. She blamed herself for having raised a gay son—she had raised him wrong, she had not taken him to church enough. Isaac's mother “fell back on religion” when he came out, citing her Biblical beliefs as the reason for her disapproval. Yet Isaac believed that she was more concerned about others' opinion of their family:

It was less about religion and—to be honest—more about other people's opinion of your family. She was more so embarrassed. That is where the anger came from. Speaking for what I know in the Black community, homosexuality is frowned upon. It's one of those things we know gays are

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<sup>181</sup> Since that time, Jarrett and his father have made amends, although reconciliation took a period of several years.

everywhere, but we don't talk about it. It's like let them be like that, but we won't talk about it. She felt the woe and despair

Her boyfriend, who lived in the house, also shaped her response to her son. He was virulently homophobic and regularly expressed to Isaac how disgusted he was with him (using the “Real Man” narrative). Under his patriarchal rule, she kept quiet. For a period of years, it was “war” at home for Isaac. Eventually Isaac left home and went to live on his own. He could no longer take the verbal abuse from his mother’s boyfriend and the cold silence from his mother:

That's where it came from. That's what pushed me to be on my own. I had a lot going on at home. I knew, Anthony you know you're gay, this is no phase, no demon that can be prayed out. I acknowledged who I was, and me I can't live here and not be gay—or be the kind of acceptable gay that you want me to be. I can only be who I am. I could not live with my Mom and her ex-boyfriend comfortably being that person.

She began to warm up to Isaac when the weight of community pressure lifted. Isaac’s mother eventually broke up with her boyfriend. No longer under his influence, she was freer to make her own decisions about how she would react to Isaac. Furthermore, when fellow church members<sup>182</sup> learned that Isaac was gay, they treated her with contempt. She began to feel the discrimination that Isaac had experienced, and she empathized with him:

It was kind of like a scarlet letter, oh she's the one with the gay son. It put her in a place where she's like, okay, this is what my son goes through every day. People talk behind his back, whisper about him, treat him like he's not a person. Now my friends, the people that prayed for me and encouraged me, are treating me like this. I think her being put aside changed her perspective about my situation. Like, I don't want people treating me this way.

When she was rejected by her community, Isaac’s mother had nothing left to lose and slowly began to accept her son’s sexuality. One day she shocked Isaac by voicing her disapproval of Chick-fil-A for opposing same-sex marriage. “Just because somebody's

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<sup>182</sup> The church that Isaac and his mother attended was also a center of the Black community in their town.

different, you don't treat them like they don't deserve love,” she exclaimed. From that point, the relationship between Isaac and his mother steadily improved. Today, she is a fervent advocate for Isaac’s rights as a gay man and is angered by the idea that anyone might discriminate against him.

### **Social Capital Pathways**

Melby and colleagues (2008) find that students who have access to relational capital within their families attained higher levels of education than those who did not, controlling for background characteristics. As gatekeepers, parent’s reactions to their child’s coming out shape access to cognitive capital and structural capital, as well as to relational capital at home<sup>183</sup>. When sexual minority men lose access to structural capital, they may lose access to these forms as well and suffer in their academic work. Figure 5.2 lists the specific forms of social capital within each category: relational capital involves the man’s sense of belonging in his family; cognitive capital refers to shared academic values and expectations between parents and children; and structural capital includes parenting style, home environment and parent involvement in school

<i>Figure 5.2. Forms of Social Capital in Families</i>		
Relational Capital	Cognitive Capital	Structural Capital
Sense of Belonging	Shared Academic Values/ Academic Expectation	Parenting Style Home Environment Parent Involvement in School

<sup>183</sup> It should be noted that depending on social class background, men may have differential access to these forms of social capital with which to begin. For instance, a man whose family has a low income may have less access to structural capital, such as academic resources in the home or the ability of parents to interact with teachers and administrators. In this section, however, I focus only on the loss of existing capital that is related to parent’s reactions to their son’s coming out.

### Cognitive Capital

While direct oversight is important in the early years of education, the single most important family predictor of academic success in children is parent's expectations for their children's education—what grades they will receive, how far they will progress in school (e.g. high school diploma, college degree). Children whose parents place a high value on education and expect them children to succeed tend to achieve higher levels of academic achievement than those whose parents place a lower value on education or do not expect them to go as far in school (Davis Kean 2005; Jeynes 2007). Every study man spoke of their parent's aspirations for their education and remembered their parents placing a high value on education. Ethan summarizes their experiences: "Education is pushed in the Black community. Parents push you." It is critical, however, that parents and children equally value education. One question then is whether an impaired parent-child relationship (relational capital) is associated with a decrease in shared academic values between parents and their children. For instance do parents who can no longer see their children's future after he comes out also lower their academic expectations of him? Or do children who have a difficult relationship with their parents after coming out begin to value education less, because it is associated with their parent's values?

The answer to both of these questions is no. In almost no case did parent's expectation for their son's education change when he came out. Jesse recalls that his mother had many plans for his future, which included education and marriage. When Jesse came out, her vision for his future was challenged. Jesse would no longer have a "traditional" family with a wife and children. Her loss of vision for Jesse's future may have expanded to a loss of academic expectations as well. Quickly, however, Jesse

provided his mother with an alternative vision for his future. He wanted to become a professor, studying the experiences of LGBT people in American society. As his mother began to accept Jesse's sexuality, she regained a shared vision for his future. When Jesse began his own advocacy work, his mother became even more comfortable with the idea of her son being gay. Jesse attributes this openness to his mother's desire "to be involved in everything that he does":

She's met a couple of my friends that have helped to give her an impression, she's seen some of my works that's gotten published. That's helped her to realize that there are lot of great things happening in the LGBT community, it's just not as advertised as everything else going on in the world. She likes being able to be involved, being able to see results, to see how I've matured in the community, to see how I've grown as a person.

If Jesse had not been able to show his mother a new vision for his future—or if his mother had not accepted this vision—Jesse may have lost the cognitive capital that he received at home through his mother's shared academic expectations.

Similarly, the vision of Kendrick's father for his son's future was disrupted when his son came out. Although he did not accept his son's sexuality, he never lost his vision for Kendrick's academic future. Kendrick would succeed in high school and go on to college. His father insisted on sending Kendrick to an academically challenging boarding school, which ended up being the environment most supportive of Kendrick's sexuality.

Wentzel (1998) finds that sexual minority children who are rejected by their parents sometimes break from the values parents have imposed on them. This may include academic values. In rebellion—and from a sense of parental rejection—gay children may devalue school and suffer academically. This was not the case for study

men generally<sup>184</sup>. Instead, parental rejection impaired men's academic engagement indirectly. Men who were rejected by their parents often experienced situational depression, which suppressed their ability to engage in schoolwork. These men did not necessarily devalue academics, but they did not have the cognitive capacity to engage fully. Jarrett experienced severe depression, when both his mother and father rejected him after coming out, and as a result he "made poor [academic] decisions" before transferring to his more supportive school. When Ben's grandmother tried to prevent him from seeing his boyfriend, his spirits were lowered. In addition to the verbal abuse he experienced at church, Ben did not have the mental energy to focus fully on his schoolwork:

I feel like the stress from home and school seeped over into school. For me, I would identify depression. I was very hard on myself because I kept hearing messages. You know I loved God and I loved serving in church the way I did. But you know, I kept hearing these hateful messages, in a place that was so familiar to me. And then to go home and not feel supported in the way that I needed to be supported. You know that sort of lowered my spirit. I was obviously resilient through it, but it was tough.

Cameron likewise experienced depression due to abuse at home. At this critical point, however, the support that he received from his counselor and Aunt Gayle helped to revive his spirits and to give him the motivation that he needed to continue at school (cognitive capital). Cameron recalls that Aunt Gayle was "everything that his parents could not be" at that time. She not only emotionally supported Cameron, but also inspired him to go further in school than he had previously imagined. She helped Cameron to apply for college and financial aid (structural capital), which his parents were not as equipped to do.

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<sup>184</sup> Although because Isaac felt like he was "hell-bound"—primarily because of experience at church—he devalued academic work for a time.

### Structural Capital

Impaired relational capital at home may also lead to declines in structural capital for sexual minority children. If a parent reacts poorly to his or her child's coming out, the parent-child relationship may be strained. Because much of the structural capital available at home relies on positive interactions between parent and children, structural capital will also be at risk. The two forms of structural capital on which I focus in this study are parent involvement in schooling and home environment.

*Parent Involvement in Schooling.* Research shows that parent involvement in schooling has a modest effect on student engagement and achievement, although this is more important in the earlier years of schooling than in high school (Fan & Williams 2010; Hill et al. 2004; Hill & Tyson 2009). Jeynes (2007) nevertheless demonstrates that the children of parents who communicate with them about their academic work and about the social problems that they face at school tend to perform moderately better in secondary school than those who have lower levels of parent communication. Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) note that too much parent communication about school is associated with lower levels of achievement, but that this is because children who require the most parental intervention are more likely to be having difficulty in school.

No studies have investigated the importance of parent involvement in schooling for the academic performance of sexual minority students, but such involvement may be especially critical for sexual minority youth because they face more problems (e.g. bullying, social exclusion, disproportionate discipline) at school than other students. These students may need a listening ear and advice from their parents about problems



that they have with their classmates (as was the case with Tyler). Or they may need parents to advocate for them when they have been treated unfairly at school (as was the case with Garrett). Neither of these forms of assistance would be possible if the parent and child no longer communicate because of a parent's negative reaction to his son coming out.

Though the involvement of Tyler and Garrett's parents helped them make it through difficult school experiences, other men experienced a decline in parent involvement in school after they came out. Many study men reported not communicating with their parents for months after coming out. In cases where parents had regularly talked about school, their involvement declined almost immediately. After Fred was outed to his mother, the two avoided each other for several months. Every conversation would end in anger—Fred's mother was upset that he was gay, and he was upset by her rejection. Many mothers (including Fred's) cared deeply about their sons' education, regularly checking up on their academic progress throughout his childhood, but temporarily lost this oversight when he came out and the relationship became tense for a time.

*Home Environment.* Education research further demonstrates that the home environment of a child both supports the completion of academic work and fosters learning outside of school. Positive home environments include a number of resources (e.g. books, educational games) that promote children's success in school. Christopher, for instance, recalls his mother making academic resources available to him despite her limited income. Davis-Kean (2005) calls these resources the "hidden curriculum" of the

home and shows that home environments have a moderate effect on academic achievement, mostly in the elementary years of schooling.

Davis-Kean's concept of the "home environment" can be extended to a broader range of home-based resources that may support education, particularly for students in secondary school. Having a comfortable and safe place to rest, having access to good nutrition, and having transportation to school (where public transportation is not available) may all be considered aspects of the home environment. While these structural resources may be taken for granted in much academic literature, they should not be assumed for sexual minority youth who face disproportionate rates of homelessness after coming out (Cochran et al. 2002).

Study men who were pushed out of their homes sometimes suffered the loss of such home resources. When he was kicked out of his home, Jarrett lost his source of transportation to school. He could have taken public transportation to school, which would have required much greater time and planning. Depressed from rejection at home and school, Jarrett did not have the energy to make this additional effort. Furthermore, public transportation was one more place where homophobic harassment might occur.

When Isaac went to live on his own, he was luckily able to find a place that he could afford on his meager student salary. But nearly every resource that he enjoyed at his mother's home was no longer available to him. Yet, Jarrett and Isaac were lucky compared to many men who are forced out of their homes. Both had a network of support in older gay friends who had graduated from high school. Men without this support are at much higher risk of dropping out of high school (Aviles de Bradley 2011; Tye 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Study men experienced a variety of reactions when they came out to their parents. While a handful of men—including Jarrett and Isaac—were pushed out of their homes, many faced less severe reactions. When parents reacted badly to finding out that their child was gay, the parent-child relationship often suffered for a time. Feeling distant from their parents, study men lost access to relational capital at home. During this time, some men became depressed because of their parent's reaction and were not able to focus on their schoolwork. Even some of those not pushed out of the house lost access to structural capital. When the parent-child relationship was strained, parents were less likely to engage in their child's academic work. Still, parent-child relationships tended to recover. Over time, many parents adopted a positive narrative about their son's sexuality or shared a warm relationship with him despite their ongoing concerns. These men regained access to relational, cognitive and structural capital—although the damage of losing access to this capital for weeks, months or years had already occurred.

In some cases, relational capital loss lasted longer. The only parents who did not repair relationships with their children—or who took many years to do so—were influenced by pressure from either their churches (as was the case in the right-wing authoritarianism response) or their communities (in the “Real Man” response). This pattern suggests that narratives alone do not guide parent's reactions as many parents who hold negative narratives change. Instead, the enforcement of these narratives within religious and racial communities influences parents by keeping negative narratives about their son's sexuality in place. On their own, parents tend to move towards acceptance.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **EXPULSION, CONVERSION OR EMBRACE: CAPITAL LOSS AND RECOVERY IN CHURCHES**

In this chapter, I consider the experience of study men in churches. Churches serve as an important source of social capital for African American youth (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). It is thus important to understand how narratives about homosexuality shape reactions when a young man comes out in church, and how these reactions affect his access to social capital. In churches, religious leaders and congregants act as gatekeepers to social capital. Most often, religious leaders set a public narrative about homosexuality within a church from the pulpit (Ward 2005), and congregants are expected to adopt this narrative. If the narrative condemns homosexuality, gatekeepers may react poorly when the young man comes out. Or a young man may predict that gatekeepers will react negatively (i.e. reject him), based on the dominant narrative, and voluntarily withdraw from the church community. Either way, the young man loses access to social capital based on the narrative.

Research finds that while churches generally provide social capital to adolescents (Smith 2003), this benefit may not apply to sexual minorities (Rostosky, Danner & Riggle 2007). Negative narratives about homosexuality undermine access to social capital by making church an unwelcoming space for sexual minority adolescents. Longo and colleagues (2013) find that sexual minority adolescents who attend church frequently have worse mental health outcomes than youth who attend less often<sup>185</sup>. Recently, however, a number of churches have embraced sexual minorities and research indicates

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<sup>185</sup> This negative association between church attendance and mental health for sexual minority youth holds in conservative, but not liberal denominations (Gattis, Woodford & Han 2014).

that LGBT youth in churches that affirm homosexuality receive the same access to social capital as their heterosexual peers (Gattis, Woodford & Han 2014).

Less is known about the experiences of sexual minority adolescents in Black churches. Black churches have been pivotal to the existence of people of African descent in the United States (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). Many, though, embrace homophobic ideology and practices (Fullilove and Fullilove 1999, Ward 2005, Wagner 1994, Sweasy 1997, Yip 1998, 1999). Academic literature paints a bleak picture for Black sexual minority men in churches (Griffin 2006). This research finds that negative messages conveyed about homosexuality from the pulpit of Black churches cause many sexual minority men to leave their churches (Foster, Arnold, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2011; Miller, 2007; Ward 2005), although Pitt (2009, 2010) demonstrates that some Black sexual minority men are able to stay involved in churches that condemn homosexuality<sup>186</sup>.

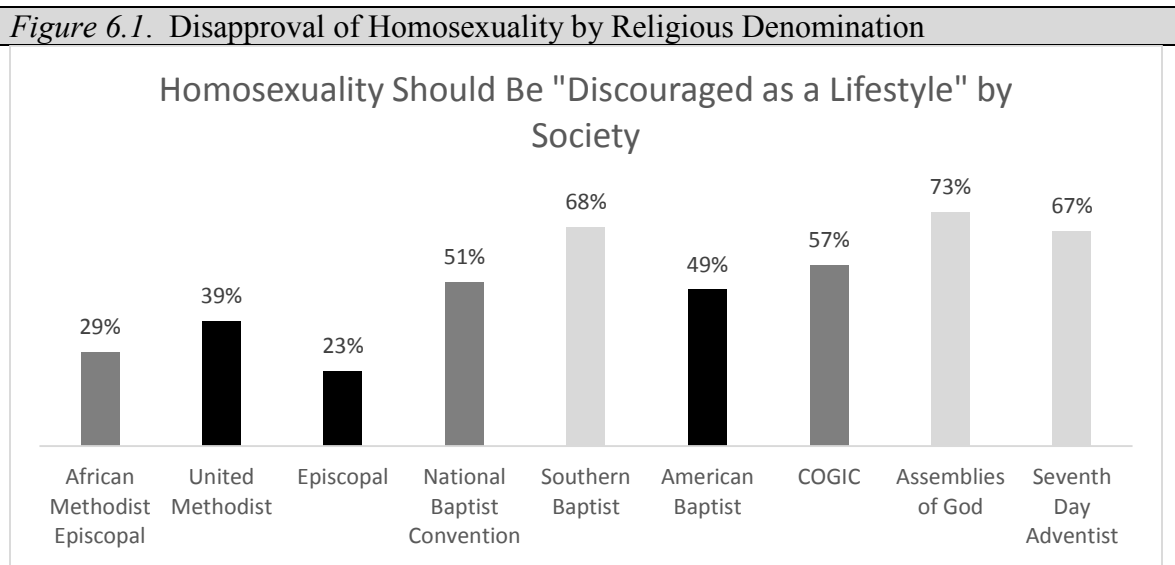
Recent data, however, suggest that the relationship between Black churches and homophobia should be viewed through a nuanced lens. Figure 6.1 shows the percentages of churchgoers within a number of Protestant denominations who believe that homosexuality should be “discouraged” by society<sup>187</sup>. Taking denominational categories into account, members of Black Protestant churches are about equally or slightly less likely to disapprove of homosexuality than their White counterparts. Members of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches, for instance, are less likely than members of

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<sup>186</sup> Also see McQueeney (2009) for a discussion of Black gay men in LGBT-affirming congregations.

<sup>187</sup> The three largest Black Protestant denominations (African Methodist Episcopal, National Baptist Convention, and Church of God in Christ) appear in dark gray, followed two predominantly White denominations within the same denominational category (Methodist-Episcopal, Baptist, and Sectarian, respectively). Mainline Protestant denominations appear in black and Conservative Protestant denominations appear in light gray.

United Methodist churches (but slightly more likely than members of Episcopal churches) to disapprove of homosexuality. Members of National Baptist Convention (NBC) churches, on the other hand, are much less likely to disapprove of homosexuality than are members of Southern Baptist churches. NBC members much more closely resemble the largest mainline Baptist denomination (American Baptist). Members of the Church of God in Christ—the largest Black Protestant denomination—are more likely to disapprove of homosexuality than are either AME or NBC members. Yet, they have a smaller proportion of non-affirming<sup>188</sup> members than the Assemblies of God and Seventh Day Adventist denominations.



Source: 2007 Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey

Given the diversity of views about homosexuality in Black Christianity, it is difficult to know how to categorize the experiences of Black sexual minority men in churches. Much academic literature considers the “Black church” as a single entity. Yet this oversimplifies reality. Some scholars make distinctions—on the basis of

<sup>188</sup> Non-affirming in this case means those who believe that homosexuality should be discouraged as a lifestyle.

denominations or priestly-prophetic distinction (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), among others.

In this chapter, I distinguish three types of Black churches as regards their treatment of homosexuality. *Authoritarian Patriarchal* churches rely on “Real Man” narratives—often a combination of visceral disgust and gender-based narratives—to uphold hegemonic masculinity within the religious community. Religious leaders regularly voice contempt and disgust toward gay people. *Traditional churches*, like authoritarian-patriarchal churches, teach that homosexuality is outside the natural order, yet they are not characterized by visceral disgust and contempt towards gay people. Their disapproval of homosexuality rests on an interpretation of the Bible that upholds Platonized Christianity. *Pluralistic* churches convey positive narratives about sexual minority people. They neither value hegemonic masculinity nor view homosexuality as falling outside the natural order. Often these churches are specifically formed to meet the needs of Black LGBT Christians.

In the following section, I consider the access to relational capital that men have in authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches. Relational capital, in this chapter, refers to the sense of belonging to the church community. I then investigate the relationship between losing access to relational capital and cognitive and structural capital in church. Finally, I reflect on the role of pluralistic churches in recovering access to capital for study men.

## **Relational Capital in Authoritarian-Patriarchal and Traditional Churches**

### Authoritarian-Patriarchal Churches

Like traditional schools, authoritarian-patriarchal churches focus heavily on policing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. These churches have a strictly hierarchical structure, in which one man or a few men<sup>189</sup> determine the church's narrative about gender and sexuality. Leaders regularly talk about homosexuality in terms of both disgust (religious-based narratives) and contempt (community-based narratives). Sexual minority men not only violate the God-ordained bounds of sexuality, but they are also not real men. In the content analysis used to identify public narratives in Chapter 3, for instance, religious leaders who emphasize that homosexuality is unnatural often point to sexual minority men's failure to meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity as one reason that they are outside the natural order.

Figure 6.2 shows examples of religious leaders who make both of these claims within their sermons. Dr. Raymond Gordon emphasizes that children are born male or female, not gay. He then goes on to associate sexual minority men with feminine traits (high-pitched voice) and identity, calling these men sick. Rev. A Payton Sr. does not believe that homosexuality is "like God" (i.e. it is outside the natural order) and that sexual minority men are weak (i.e. not real men). Rev. Jamal Bryant explains that the God brings together men and women, not men and men. He then blames men who do not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity ("sanctified sissies") for the breakdown of Black men and Black families.

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<sup>189</sup> In some cases, women have a leadership role. But this is typically in a gender-restricted (e.g. "First Lady").



<i>Figure 2. Natural Order and “Real Man” Narratives in Authoritarian-Patriarchal Churches</i>		
	Homosexuality is not natural:	Gay men are not “real men”:
Dr. Raymond Gordon	“No child is born homosexual or lesbian. That's a lie from the pit. You either came out a girl or a boy. It's God's will that you go out a girl or a boy. You do not have an alternative to your sexuality <sup>190</sup> .”	“You didn't come out of your mother's womb saying 'aaah' and then changing your voice. If you are a man that wants to be a woman...then you are sick <sup>191</sup> .”
A Payton Sr.	“I am talking to those pastors who allow homosexuals in the house of the living God...God is going to break down anything in His sanctuary that is not like him <sup>192</sup> .”	“If you are a homosexual, accept the fact that God says you are weak <sup>193</sup> .”
Rev. Jamal Bryant	“Whenever God is about to do something great, he always brings together two things that are not alike...He does not bring a man and a man together. He brings a man and a female together <sup>194</sup> .”	Homosexuality and sanctified sissies are causes of the breakdown of the black man and the black family <sup>195</sup> .

The “Real Man” narrative drives the treatment of homosexuality in authoritarian-patriarchal churches. Michael remembers: “It was just a lot of hyper-masculine bullshit.” Because hegemonic masculinity is so highly valued at these churches, sexual minority men represent a threat<sup>196</sup>. They need to be expelled. Leaders justified this expulsion by

<sup>190</sup> Gordon, Dr. R. (2013, June 30). Sermon. Retrieved from <http://stmatthews.sermon.net/8624506>.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Payton Sr., A. (2011, January 29). Homosexuality in the house of God. Retrieved from <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v207586676QqygwwJ>.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Bryant, J. (2012, September 28). Sermon. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4TJie4qwvs>.

<sup>195</sup> Bryant, J. (2014, June 3). I am my enemy's worst nightmare. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT\\_0H2EnQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DcT_0H2EnQ).

<sup>196</sup> This threat is primarily to the masculinity of men within the church (community ethic) but may also represent a spiritual threat. By having profane elements (gay people) in their community, the sacred space

buttressing the “Real Man” narrative with a number of religious narratives<sup>197</sup>—“It’s Not Natural”, Demon Possession, and “It’s the End of the World” (Moral Decline).

Leaders of authoritarian-patriarchal churches often display visceral disgust towards sexual minority men. These men used much of the same language present in the “It’s Not Natural” narrative presented in Chapter 3. Jonathan recalls his pastor saying that “when two men kiss, it is a foul smell to the Lord.” Ben’s assistant pastor said that “if you’re a homosexual and you’re sleeping with the same sex, you might as well be sleeping with an animal,” because “they are both mentioned around the same time in the Bible.” Kendrick’s church expressed disgust towards gay people (calling homosexuality an “abomination”), though spoke with less visceral disgust than other authoritarian-patriarchal churches, according to him:

Just the normal, that it's an abomination. One person actually said you're going to hell. It's not right. Two men aren't supposed to be together, two women aren't supposed to be together. Nothing too vulgar, nothing too out of the normal.

It is interesting to note that many men who experienced narratives of disgust at church simply found this language commonplace in churches<sup>198</sup>. It is possible that people who are used to hearing harsh language directed at non-heterosexuality at church may become desensitized to such invectives over time.

Other leaders teach that gay people are demon-possessed. James recalls: “Anything that was not heteronormative was the devil.” When he acted in a way that violated hegemonic masculinity, his pastor told him that the “devil was inside him”:

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of the church might be tainted. As a result, congregants might be less able to connect with the God (divinity ethic).

<sup>197</sup> As discussed in Appendix B, these narratives operate on a disgust psychology.

<sup>198</sup> This phenomenon also occurred in traditional churches, although less often. Xavier, for instance, attended a church that he described as “not a typical homophobic Black church”. Yet church leaders still spoke of gay men in gender stereotypical terms (“men who carry purses and wear make-up”).

It didn't help that I grew up in the church. It didn't help when I got preachers preaching on homosexuality. Me acting like a girl and having these attractions towards boys, to them that was the devil. He was in me, trying to make me go down this wrong path. So I naturally became depressed. I used to pray and pray that the feelings I had for boys that I could pray these away and they would never happen.

Perhaps the most extreme religious-based narrative, demon possession suggests that a homosexual person is fully contaminated with “evil”. Yet, whereas religious leaders offer the possibility of deliverance for many forms of demon possession, this is not always the case for homosexuality. Religious leaders in authoritarian-patriarchal offered little possibility of deliverance<sup>199</sup>. Likely, this was not because they did not believe in the power of God to deliver. Instead, the narrative of demon possession operates as a powerful tool of expulsion in the case of homosexuality. If sexual minority men are influenced by evil, then they must be expelled from the sacred space of the church. Whereas some forms of demon possession (such as physical ailments) function to show the power of the divine, other forms (such as homosexuality) function to maintain group boundaries. In the case of authoritarian-patriarchal churches, this boundary is hegemonic masculinity.

In other cases, the need for expulsion is accentuated through fear-based narratives. Gay people (men, in particular) portend the end of the world. Elijah’s pastor said that the “world would come to an end because of more gay people.” He also preached a narrative of personal destruction: “Gay people will be burned in hell.” Over time, these narratives of destruction left Elijah disillusioned with the church of his childhood:

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<sup>199</sup> Apart from the occasional call for deliverance mixed in with messages harshly condemning sexual minority people

You know how the world is coming to an end because you have two men holding hands. I used to just sit there and was like, wow the world is coming to an end because there are more gay people. I got very angry, I wanted to get up and leave but I stayed. They go on the pulpit and preach that, getting down on gay people. I'm like you don't have to talk about the topic, especially if you have your own baggage in the closet.

Together, the narratives of “It’s Not Natural”, Demon Possession and “It’s the End of the World” powerfully undergird “Real Man” narrative in authoritarian-patriarchal churches. Based in disgust and fear psychology, they justify the expulsion of sexual minorities from the church community. Study men felt the force of expulsion acutely within authoritarian-patriarchal churches. Eddie describes the sermon as a tool to target sexual minorities. His church “talked about homosexuality all the time” and the pastors would “improvise sermons” to let gay parishioners know that they were not welcome:

I do believe that preachers see gay people in the audience and have a conversation about homosexuality. I'm a firm believer that they actually change their sermons—that they say things that actually make you feel scared.

Furthermore, negativity from the pulpit trickled down from the pastor to members of the church, some of whom acted in a “hateful” way toward Eddie. Because he did not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity—he dressed in both men’s and women’s clothing—he “got more stares” at church than anywhere else. Regularly having had negative experiences, Eddie believes hate towards sexual minority men is universal in churches<sup>200</sup>:

That was the place for the hate. You're in a place where people feel like this is what God says. Anything outside of that [hegemonic masculinity]

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<sup>200</sup> This reflects the findings of Ward (2005) that the church’s reaction to sexual minority members is largely dictated by message from the pulpit. Whatever narrative leaders at authoritarian-patriarchal churches convey becomes hegemonic.

will be like, oh my God what are you doing with your life, you're a sinner. The homosexuals are burning, going to hell, repent, you're going to die because of AIDS, come to the altar, those types of things. I think that's universal in church, though.

During one sermon, when the pastor pointed in Eddies' direction, he could not take the vitriol anymore. He stormed out the church building, wanting not to return again.

Other authoritarian-patriarchal churches enact moral panics (Cohen 2002) against suspected sexual minority men. Moral panics, in these cases, serve to reinforce the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity in the church community. When leaders discover that a man might be gay, they attempt to uncover the truth—often in highly invasive ways. Once outed, the man is made to feel so uncomfortable in church that he has no choice but to leave. Church leaders targeted Will when someone at church discovered his profile at a website geared toward LGBT youth. Will had already undergoing counseling for suspected homosexuality at the church after his mother informed an elder at his church that she thought her son might be gay. The elder had given Will faulty advice about how to overcome same-sex attraction and encouraged Will to stay away from his gay friends:

There was one brother in our hall whom I was studying with when I was baptized at 14. He is the one who my Mom had talked with and said, 'You know I think my son might be gay. What do I do?' He told me you need to read this book. He told me that I needed to stop sleeping on my stomach because that was what was fueling my homosexual tendencies. He told me I needed to make sure that I wasn't hanging around any gay people so that I didn't get any ideas.

Already wary about church based on this counseling experience, Will considers the events that took place when his online profile was discovered served as another “red flag”:

I get to the Kingdom Hall and there is a powwow of elders. There were like oh we saw your picture on a gay website. I was thinking to myself, like that's when red flags went up. I said okay, this is ridiculous. How would you even have known? They were like someone saw your profile on there. I was like how would someone even know my profile was on that website unless someone was actively looking for it. I honestly was very cautious about who I talked to on that website. That was the first thing where I was like, okay it's time for me to get the hell out of here.

Will knew that he needed to leave for his own sake. Yet he had never been without a church community. Like many study men at authoritarian-patriarchal churches, Will was highly involved in church. Church was home when he was growing up. So, he feared the loss of access to relational capital at church as much as he did at home or school. He worried that leaving the church community would mean leaving behind what had given him meaning in life and hope for life after death:

I had this notion in my head that my life would be miserable if I decided to leave the organization. There was this idea that if you are gay and you are acting on your feelings, then you are going to be in eternal hell. That was the way they painted my entire life to be. There were elements of shame, the element of is this going to be my life forever. Can I have a happy life?

Yet, Will had no choice. Eventually, the strain that his community placed on him became so great that he had to break away from church:

Eventually I said, 'Screw this. I'm going to live in my truth.' It was like I was taught to be very fearful of whom I was. It got to the point where I was very fearful of seeing anyone from my Kingdom Hall, because I was fearful of what they would think of me. It was like this engrained fear that was constantly pounded into my head.

Even after leaving the church community, Will felt the weight of community pressure.

And Will's experience was not unique. The break from authoritarian-patriarchal churches often resulted in alienation and an ongoing sense of guilt and emotional hurt for study men.

The fear of leaving was so great that some study men chose to stay in hiding, rather than come out and face expulsion. These men shut down emotionally in church. James, who was highly involved in his authoritarian-patriarchal church during childhood, went into hiding when he realized that the church's negative comments about gay people applied to him. He knew that he was not the only sexual minority person in the church community; there were older gay musicians and clergy. Yet, because they dealt with their sexuality by hiding, he had no choice but to do the same:

It made me shut down in those spaces. I wouldn't voice my opinions. In the same church, I would see men who were musicians and preachers, who I knew or heard rumors, heard my parents talk about they're sleeping with such and such, they're gay. But they would be the same one's preaching the crazy propaganda. So it was very hurtful, and very problematic—to see people I knew or at least heard were gay saying that gay people were going to hell.

James tried to change his mannerisms to match the church's expectation of hegemonic masculinity. But hiding wore on him. James remembers feeling like he was “constantly on the hot seat” when the preacher railed against homosexuality. The church's narratives about homosexuality made him feel isolated to the point that he often contemplated suicide. Like Will, James made a break from his authoritarian-patriarchal church, but he did not do so until college. In the meantime, he had limited access to relational capital in the church community, having emotionally disengaged out of psychological necessity.

Joshua likewise tried to conceal his sexuality. When he began to realize that he was gay, he became involved with a number of men. He was torn between accepting his sexuality and adhering to the negative narratives in his church—that gay people were less than real men, that they were possessed, and that they were going to hell. Joshua knew that he could not tell anyone at his church about his struggle. Rather than completely

shutting down at church, as James did, Joshua was forced to create split selves. One adhered to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity and another that explored his identity as a bisexual man. Joshua believes this was a common experience for sexual minority men at churches like his. Many of the men with whom he developed relationships were fellow church leaders.

Joshua's contradictory lives paid a heavy psychological toll on him. When a fellow church member found his profile on a gay dating website, a moral panic ensued and he was pushed out of the church community for a time. For Joshua, this ended up being a beneficial experience, as it encouraged him to find a church community that accepted his sexuality. In his new community, he did not have to live two lives.

Authoritarian-patriarchal churches create a highly unsafe space for sexual minority men<sup>201</sup>. Like traditional schools, these churches focus on policing the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. Men who do not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity—i.e. sexual minority men—find themselves on the outside of the church community. Unlike traditional schools, authoritarian-patriarchal churches employ a number of religious narratives to justify the expulsion of sexual minorities from the church community. Study men experienced the weight of this expulsion through sermons directed at them, moral panics, and the need to hide their sexuality at all costs. Eventually, almost all of them left their authoritarian-patriarchal churches while they were still in high school. Those who did not still did not feel they belonged. With the constant condemnation of homosexuality, they could not. When people think of “the Black church” as being particularly homophobic, they may be thinking of authoritarian-

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<sup>201</sup> Authoritarian-patriarchal churches also likely have influence on parent narratives and reactions.



patriarchal churches. Yet this is only one type of Black church. In the following section, I consider the experiences of sexual minority men in traditional Black churches.

### Traditional Churches

Traditional churches share with authoritarian-patriarchal churches the belief that homosexuality is outside the natural order. Here, the similarities end. Traditional churches do not use the “Real Man” narrative. They talk less frequently about homosexuality. When they do, the focus is on restoring sexual minority congregants back to the natural order rather than expelling them from the religious community. Traditional churches rely on three narratives to address homosexuality: Biblical inerrancy, personal destruction, and “You Can Change”. Together, these narratives uphold a view of Christianity that is heavily influenced by Platonic dualism. Gay people are outside the natural order and are thus non-believers who will not go to heaven when they die.

Narratives of Biblical inerrancy are common at traditional churches<sup>202</sup>. Church leaders simply emphasize that the “Bible says”—or that “God says”—homosexuality is wrong. They sometimes pull out specific verses—like Leviticus 18:22 or Romans 1:26—but more often refer to the Bible’s condemnation of homosexuality with less specificity<sup>203</sup>. It is simply taken as a given. Jeff’s church, for instance, rarely mentioned homosexuality. The few times that the pastor did, he maintained a calm demeanor (as opposed to the heightened emotion at authoritarian-patriarchal churches); he simply stated that the Bible disapproved and moved on.

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<sup>202</sup> National data (Sahgal & Smith 2009) indicate that belief in Biblical inerrancy is more common amongst Black Christians than White Christians. Nevertheless, this difference breaks down along denominational lines. Members of Black Protestant churches are about equally as likely to members of Evangelical Protestant to support Biblical inerrancy—62 percent to 59 percent, respectively. Only 22 percent of Mainline Protestant church members, however, support biblical inerrancy.

<sup>203</sup> Although narratives of Biblical inerrancy rest on an interpretation of several scriptures ostensibly related to homosexuality (discussed in Chapter 3), church leaders rarely delve into specific biblical passages.

In other cases, strong psychological dependence on hegemonic Biblical interpretations—i.e., that homosexuality violates the natural order—underlies the calm presentation of Biblical truth. When study men challenged these interpretations, some church members felt threatened and reacted angrily (Van Hiel 2010). Cameron remembers having the Bible thrown at him—literally—when he challenged his friends’ view that the Bible condemns homosexuality. Reactions like this suggest that some churchgoers find psychological comfort in the vision of the natural order (i.e. how the world works) that is taught in authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches. Challenging the idea that homosexuality is sinful threatens not only this specific belief, but also their conception of how the world operates.

Unlike in authoritarian-patriarchal churches, traditional churches are less likely to claim that homosexuality portends the end of the world or the downfall of the Black community. Many traditional churches, however, emphasize that homosexual behavior might lead to personal destruction by condemning offenders to hell. Bryan recalls a woman at his church saying that gay people would go to hell. This comment had a significant impact on what Bryan: “That’s what stuck with me for so long. I thought that I could not be gay and Christian.” The narrative of personal destruction relies on a dualistic vision of the universe, in which believers will go to heaven and non-believers will go to hell. Gay people are counted among the non-believers because they are tainted by sexual passion that falls outside the natural order<sup>204</sup>. They are thus at risk of hell. Unlike authoritarian-patriarchal churches, however, leaders of traditional churches are not satisfied with leaving LGBT members condemned to hell. They want to save them.

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<sup>204</sup> Whereas any sexual passion would have placed a person outside the natural order—and amongst the non-believers—in earlier centuries, homosexual passion does so now that heterosexual passion is considered natural.

This salvation comes by freeing sexual minority people of their same-sex attraction<sup>205</sup>. Rid of homosexuality, sexual minorities are restored to the natural order; and within the natural order, they may be counted as a true believer. As a believer, they may enter heaven rather than face eternal damnation (hell). Leaders of traditional churches sometimes employ a “You Can Change” narrative when faced with gay congregants. Leaders at Joseph’s church believed that homosexuality could be cured through prayer:

It was very subtle. It was like, let us know if you want us to pray for you. We’re praying for you. Every other sermon they would bring up sin, and homosexuality was one of those sins. It was linked together with addiction, adultery, and all of those other types of sins...Because it was in those categories, it was always something that could be prayed for. In that sense, your sin could be washed away. You could be renewed in your spirit. It could be dealt with through the church in their eyes.

Anthony’s pastor responded similarly. Because Anthony was so close to his pastor, he felt comfortable confiding in him about his sexuality. His believed that Anthony could turn away from his homosexuality, presumably by becoming straight. Anthony disagreed. He was gay and wanted the church to accept him. While Anthony acknowledged the guidance of his pastor throughout his childhood, he decided to leave his church:

He said, ‘I don’t know what God is doing in your life, I hope you come around.’ But I never looked at him or judged him for his judgment for his vitriolity to my sexuality, because he was such a prominent role model in my life. When I was 15, I branched off and left the church I had grown up in.

Xavier, on the other hand, followed the advice of religious leaders to pursue changing his sexual orientation. He chose to attend a college that had a sexual orientation change program:

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<sup>205</sup> Although in some cases, it may be expected that sexual minority people will continue to struggle with same sex attraction for a long period of time (a lifetime, in some cases).

That continuing belief that I could be changed. I went to weekly support group, had an accountability buddy. Any time that we had same sex desires, we were supposed to tell each other, to pray and hold each other accountable. We would meet in groups, to talk about our struggles, to read certain Bible verses that would confirm that these desires were not of God. It was supposed to give of strength to overcome those desires. I did that my freshman year of college.

Xavier's lack of success in changing his sexual orientation led him into a deep state of depression and alcohol and drug addiction. Xavier's Christian friends noticed his declining state and encouraged him to leave the change program. They assured Xavier that he was "just fine" as a gay man<sup>206</sup>:

It wasn't until that accountability buddy, as well as some allies at the University, saw what I was going through. I also began to become a heavy alcoholic and use some other drugs too. I was beginning to get on a more destructive path. My friends saw that and picked up on that. They were really the motivation that I was really fine, that I didn't have to change anything about myself.

The different reaction between Anthony's pastor and Xavier's points to an important change within traditional Black churches. The standard response in these churches has been to encourage sexual orientation change. Increasingly, however, this method has been shown not only ineffective but also damaging to sexual minority people (APA 2009; Schroeder & Shidlo 2002). The example of Xavier's friends indicates that some young, Black Christians may be moving away from a "You Can Change" narrative<sup>207</sup>.

Another sign of change in traditional Black churches is the presence of non-homophobic everyday theology (Moon 2004), although one that is sometimes ambivalent in its stance towards the morality of homosexuality. In these narratives, religious leaders

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<sup>206</sup> "Born that Way" narrative

<sup>207</sup> One national survey (Pew 2012) paints a more complicated picture, however. Black Americans are more likely than White or Hispanic Americans to believe that homosexuality can be changed—54 versus 32 and 42 percent, respectively. And younger Americans (18-29) are about as likely as other age groups to believe that homosexuality can be changed.

attempt to support their sexual minority congregants, but without going so far as to offer formal theological support for homosexuality. Unlike in authoritarian-patriarchal churches, where there is little room for dissent, support for LGBT parishioners exists within some traditional churches. Sometimes this involved allowing for slight concessions to the church's stand on homosexuality to be made from the pulpit. At a church that Drake attended on occasion, he heard a pastor convey an "Ethic of Love" narrative. Rather than condemning gay people for their sin, Christians should focus on their own sins while loving others. Drake recalls:

It wasn't even a gay church, it was just a regular church and a regular sermon. He said why are you all trying to judge and condemn everybody's sin when you are sinning yourself? Unless you have no sin, then you can't condemn anybody else. Then you're going to hell your damn self. That was the first time I really heard anybody stick up for the gays in the church community.

A guest preacher at Bryan's church even implied that because gay people are "born that way"—that homosexuality might not be an accident on God's part. While the pastor did not explicitly affirm same-sex relationships, he likewise hesitated to call homosexuality a sin. The pastor's message deeply impacted Bryan. It opened the possibility that Bryan might not be "going to hell" because of his attractions to men:

One day we had a guest preacher and he said that sin is sin. Everybody has their sin. If some people are born gay, how can it be an accident? It just made me feel better about myself. He made me feel more positive about who I was as a person. I was keeping every feeling I had to myself. I started to say I can't burn in hell, I was born a certain way. And no matter how hard I fought, I'm still attracted to men. I don't feel like I should go to hell for how I naturally feel.

Other times, the pastor of a traditional church may adopt a form of non-homophobic everyday theology himself in responding to LGBT church members. Isaac's uncle—also the pastor of his church—supported his nephew up to a certain point when he came out at

church. He refrained from delivering negative messages about homosexuality to Isaac after he came out, but he also did not convey a positive narrative about homosexuality from the pulpit.

Jesse's pastor, on the other hand, did. While still in the process of developing a positive narrative about her son's sexuality, Jesse's mother approached the pastor of their family's church. She wanted to make sure that the church would provide a safe, supportive environment for Jesse. Jesse's pastor responded by delivering a sermon the following Sunday about the "inclusion of all people" into the church family. While he did not explicitly affirm same-sex relationships, the pastor's step assured Jesse and his mother that church was a "safe space":

I talked to my Mom one day and she went to the pastor of the church and talked about it. And he just delivered this awesome sermon. We have to realize that the people in this world all desire to be in the church. One of those moments like with the pastoral care group where it was like you are loved, God loves you, and we want you to be in this family just as much as anybody else.

Even the most conciliatory response of pastors in traditional churches, however, was not enough to make study men feel like they belonged in the church community for the long term. Pastors who voiced non-homophobic everyday theologies in these cases sometimes still implied that gay people were outside the natural order<sup>208</sup>, which meant that study men could not fully be part of the church community even if their fellow churchgoers treated them warmly. In less extreme ways than men in authoritarian-patriarchal churches, they slowly lost access to relational capital (the sense that the "fit" in the church community) when they came to accept their sexuality. After Jesse's pastor gave

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<sup>208</sup> They may have been grappling with whether this was actually the case. Without explicitly stating the opposite, study men often took it this way.

his loving sermon, Jesse still felt that he didn't quite fit into his religious tradition (Baptist) as he had experienced it after a time and he eventually left his church.

### **Social Capital Pathways**

Study men in both authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches disengaged in large numbers<sup>209</sup>. Most men (n = 21) simply left their churches. Men who left their home churches immediately cut themselves off from both the cognitive and structural capital that they had previously experiences. Will and Joshua were pushed to leave when moral panics were enacted against them. Jonathan, “tired of fighting” himself, left his church on verge of coming out. Other men (n = 6) continued to attend their home churches, but disengaged emotionally from the church. These men continued to attend church, but withdrew from relationships with church leaders and peers. As with schools, men who emotionally disengaged from churches—even when remaining physically present—had access to less access to social capital than men who were consistently involved in churches. This was the case for Elijah, who felt obligated to attend his home church but was hurt by its members’ rejection of homosexuality.

<i>Table 6.1. Ongoing Engagement by Church Category</i>			
	Authoritarian-Patriarchal	Traditional	Total
Stayed Involved	1	2	3
Emotionally Disengaged	2	4	6
Left Church	5	16	21
Total	8	22	30

<sup>209</sup> This finding differs from previous research (Jeffries, Dodge & Sandfort 2008; Pitt 2009, 2010), which shows that Black sexual minority men are likely to stay involved in non-affirming churches. It may be the case that there is a generational difference between this study and the previous one, where younger Black sexual minority men are less likely to stay involved in non-affirming churches. This may be because younger generations are less involved in church more generally or because younger sexual minority men have access to more affirming spaces outside church than do older men.

That most men in both authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches experienced a complete loss in access to social capital illustrates the severe consequences of negative, gatekeepers narratives conveyed by church leaders. Intentions matter little. Even when negative narratives are delivered in a milder tone or with more helpful intentions—as was the case in many traditional churches—these narratives still cut sexual minority men off from relational capital in their church communities. Feeling rejected by their church communities, these men lose access to both cognitive and structural capital. I focus on three forms of cognitive capital (spiritual support, racial support and moral directives) and three types of structural capital (leadership skills, cross-generational ties and network closure) available to men in churches, which are displayed in Figure 6.3.

<i>Figure 6.3. Forms of Social Capital in Churches</i>		
Relational Capital	Cognitive Capital	Structural Capital
Sense of Belonging	Spiritual Support Racial Support Moral Directives	Leadership Opportunities Cross-generational ties Network Closure

### Cognitive Capital

*Spiritual Support.* Smith (2003) explains that many religions provide youth with beliefs and practices that help them to cope constructively with life’s problems (Ellison & Sherkat 1991; Koenig, George, and Siegler 1988; Pargament et al. 1998). Such beliefs and practices include prayer, confession, reconciliation, and forgiveness amongst others (Taylor et al. 2000; Worthington, Berry, and Parrott 2001). For many study men, religion provided guidance and support in everyday life. When they faced difficult situations at home or school, they could take their worries to God. Sometimes they found guidance through prayer. Sometimes they found a sense of peace that helped them not to be



overwhelmed by stress. When their churches rejected them, however, some men lost not only a sense of belonging to their individual congregation, but also their connection to God and the peace that this relationship provided. At church, William learned to find peace and guidance through prayer:

Church was a really big thing. It gave me a lot of spiritual support. The prayer gave me the ease of knowing that everything would be okay. Every time I had a big decision, I always started with prayer first—you know, God have your way, do your will.

Yet his church's insistence that the Bible condemned homosexuality began to make William feel like he didn't fit in organized Christianity. For a time, this message damaged the sense of connection to God that prayer had provided and the peace that it gave him in daily life. Today, William continues to have "personal conversations with God" through prayer. He considers himself a spiritual person and hopes that he will once again be able to find a place within the Church as a sexual minority man.

*Racial Support.* Other research finds that religion has historically served an especially important coping tool in African American communities (Fullilove & Fullilove, 1999; Griffin, 2006). Often, these communities have used religion as a representation of hope and perseverance in the face of systematic injustice (Griffin 2006). Research shows that Black churches provide members with resilience in the face of structural and interactional racism (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Garmezzy, 1991). Furthermore, African American youth who attend Black churches are more likely to receive positive racial socialization (Brown, 2008; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999) than those unaffiliated with these religious institutions.

Little research exists on the experiences of sexual minorities within Black churches, however. This research suggests a complicated relationship, in which sexual

minority people hope to find solace and a buffer against racism, but meanwhile struggle with negative narratives about homosexuality in many Black churches (Bowleg et al. 2003; Walker & Longmire-Avital 2013). Other men find the Black church both a safe haven and a source of resilience for growing up in the face of structural and interpersonal racism. For James, the church was a center point of both his family and the local Black community. The church offered a haven of support in an otherwise “White-dominated” society:

Church was the only place in a very much White-dominated society where it was Black-centered, so there was a natural connection with community and with heritage at church. I love church, I love to sing, I love the theater of church, especially of the Black church. I was involved in choir, in the youth program, I did a lot of things through my church.

This is why it was so difficult for James to experience opposition to his sexuality within the church that he grew up. Daily, James carried the positive messages about his Blackness into school and society. Yet, he struggled to find racial support from church when he realized that he was the target of homophobic hatred.

*Moral Directives.* In addition to offering spiritual and racial support, church communities provide moral directives of self-control and personal virtue to young people. Smith (2003) explains that these moral directives are “grounded in the authority of long historical traditions and narratives, into which members are inducted” (p. 20). Youth “internalize these moral orders and use them to guide their life choices and moral commitments” (p. 20). Some of these moral commitments (e.g. a strong work ethic, honesty, and respect for elders) may contribute to academic success. In churches that hold negative narratives about homosexuality, however, restrictive sexual ethics may be inextricably tied to an entire set of moral directives (which also include directives

relevant to academic success). Sexual minority youth who break from moral directives regarding sexuality when they feel rejected at church may also break from directives that were helpful to their academic success.

For Isaac, the feeling of shame associated with not being able to live up to the church's moral directives in the area of sexuality led him to give up all of the moral commitments he had internalized through church. When Isaac's church preached the narrative of personal destruction for homosexuals, he felt that he was bound for hell. Since Isaac was without hope, he "lived like he was hell-bound":

Why would I get close to God and pray to him and build a relationship with him, when this spirit plans to send me to hell the minute I day, which could be any day? So why not live my life hell-bound and do what the hell I want to do, if that's where my life's going to end up anyway. With people talking down on you telling you you're going to go to hell, you start to believe it. I prayed, because that's what you're taught to do. But as far as having a relationship with God, I didn't really. It scared me away from God. I felt like he doesn't love me, that I'm disgusting to him, because other people say that I'm disgusting to me. He loves me, but He doesn't love me enough because I'm still going to hell.

During the time that Isaac lived as if hell-bound, he took part in a number of dangerous activities and shifted focus away from his schoolwork. His grades spiraled. Although he managed to graduate, his suppressed grade point average meant that he lacked access to the competitive colleges that he might have otherwise have had.

### Structural Capital

Research indicates that Black churches serve as an important source of structural capital for young people, particularly in communities where other institutions have been depleted by structural racism (Patillo-McCoy 1998). These forms of structural capital include leadership skills, cross-generational ties and network closure.

*Leadership Skills.* Smith (2003) explains that churches provide an organizational context in which young people can “observe, learn, and practice valuable community life skills and leadership skills” (p. 23), which can also be used in the school setting. For instance, young people may be given the chance to deliver sermons or testimonies, which fosters their public speaking skills. Likewise, young people who lead Bible studies or youth group activities are able to hone their managerial skills.

A number of study men were highly involved in church leadership, even from a young age. Jonathan echoes the desire of other study men to be actively involved in his church community: “I didn't just want to sit in the congregation and stare, I wanted to do something.” Jonathan volunteered for the audio-visual team with another adult man at his church. Though behind the scenes, Jonathan’s work played an integral role in the worship experience of his fellow church members. Jonathan lost both this opportunity and his church community when he decided that his church community would not accept him should he come out.

Joshua felt called to be a pastor from a young age, and began speaking before his congregation at the age of 14. When Joshua was outed to his church, he lost the opportunity to continue honing his speaking skills through offering sermons at his church. When Joshua found an affirming church, he regained the opportunity to lead church members through his sermons. Jesse had been involved in his church’s missionary team for years when he was appointed to a leadership position during high school. When Jesse left his church, he also resigned from his leadership position.

*Cross Generational Ties and Network Closure.* In addition to leadership skills, youth in churches may gain capital through their relationships with older church

members. Putnam (2001) explains that the church is one of the few social institutions in which adolescents participate actively and is not age-stratified in terms of social interaction (also see Smidt 1999). Smith (2003) explains the benefit of these intergenerational relationships: “Adolescents' ties to older members of their religious congregations may also afford them access to otherwise less available sources of opportunities, resources, and information” (p. 26). For instance, older adults may provide job opportunities or help with college applications. In addition to providing youth with resources, cross-generational ties also create relational networks in which older church members are able to oversee and guide the behavior of youth in constructive ways. Coleman (1988) calls this phenomenon *network closure*. Research indicates that network closure supports parents in guiding their child’s development (Fletcher et al. 2001) and has a positive relationship with the educational outcomes of children (Carbonaro 1998; Morgan and Sorensen 1999).

Joseph attended a predominantly White church where most members were older. These older church members acted as “mentors” to Joseph. Although his mentors “could not have understood” Joseph’s sexuality—and likely would have disapproved—Joseph did internalize their messages about “promiscuity”:

I think I was influenced at a young age not to be promiscuous, because that's just what the older people around me were speaking of. That's what I was influenced to do, to respect myself.

While Joseph believes this influence was positive, he realized that he was not able to internalize all the values of his mentors—specifically, heterosexual marriage. As Joseph accepted his sexuality and pursued a relationship with a male classmate, these cross-generation ties weakened.

Like many study men, Austin attended his family church. Both Austin's mother and all of his extended family attended the church, which provided strong network closure. Because of his strong network of connections at church, Austin could not simply leave the church. To do so would have been to leave his family and his community. But Austin did begin to withdraw from these relationships in the church setting:

I started going less and less, because I felt too bad. Those messages they were telling me, they were telling me that I was an outcast, that I was wrong. So I knew that I was in the wrong place.

Although Austin did not completely lose this network when he disengaged, he likely made less use of whatever access to capital that he had through relationships at his church. Ben and Jarrett likewise enjoyed network closure through attending church with their grandmothers. Both of these men experienced a loss of network closure when they separated from their church communities.

### **Pluralistic Churches and Social Capital Recovery**

A handful of study men found their way to churches that affirmed their sexuality<sup>210</sup>. In pluralistic churches, leaders denounce gender hierarchy and explicitly affirm sexual minority people. As in pluralistic schools, leaders replace hegemonic masculinity with an inclusive masculinity that values gay and straight men equally. Just as gay men do not fall outside the community boundaries in pluralistic schools, they do not fall outside the natural order in pluralistic churches. These churches adopt formal theologies of inclusion. These theologies critique the historical exclusion of sexual minorities within Western Christianity. In this way, they reflect the vision of Womanist theology set out by theologians, such as Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas and Rev. Dr. Renita Weems.

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<sup>210</sup> No men started in pluralistic churches.

Study men often felt a great sense of freedom when they found churches that accepted their sexuality. Marcus reflects on his experience at a pluralistic church, after having grown up hiding his sexuality in the church that his parents pastored:

They want to go to church, they want to fellowship somewhere, but they're always told they can't, or that they have to be in hiding, that they can't be who they really want to be. So for me to come to this church...being in that environment, watching people being able to fellowship and pray freely, really has been the best thing. It's not like if I say I'm gay, they're going to get the torches and the pitchforks and try to run me out of church. I just feel like I'm being fed spiritually, which is what really matters. You know for me it doesn't matter gay or straight. It's about what can I learn from you and how can I feed my spirit to be a better person, to help other people out during their times and their situations.

Pluralistic churches helped men to recover the access to relational and cognitive social capital they lost in authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches. Michael joined his church (authoritarian-patriarchal) at an early age. Because he felt disconnected from his family when he was young, church was home and provided the relational capital to which he did not have access at home. Church was also the place where Michael received affirmation in his leadership abilities:

It was just a fun place for me, I just really liked going to church. Part of it was being afraid of going to hell—it was just the whole hell thing that scared me. I didn't even connect gay with going to hell when I started going to church. It just felt like a family. For me, I felt disconnected from my family because I was so different. But that place that I was able to shine was in church. I was very soft-spoken as a kid, I had a different type of demeanor that had been translated as preacher material.

Because the church played such an important role in his development, rejection by his church community impacted Michael especially negatively. Yet Michael was resilient. He continued to seek a church home. One of Michael's closest mentors—a gay teacher at a private school that Michael attended for one year—encouraged Michael to give up religion. Being gay was okay, but Christianity was not, according to his mentor. Feeling

misunderstood in his pursuit of a church community, Michael left the private school and ended his relationship with his mentor. The result could have been profoundly disruptive if Michael had not found an affirming church community through his Sociology instructor. The affirming church to which Michael was connected restored his relational capital at church and helped him to accept himself as a gay man:

The pastor met with me, and he was like you've got a place with us. It was crazy to be in a Black place that was full of queer people, and a Black church that was full of queer people. It actually threw me for a loop. At first I was scared and then I was comfortable. I was like this is a real place. This is how it should feel. This is how it should feel.

Michael's long pursuit finally led him to a church home that affirmed his entire personhood, including his sexuality.

Alex likewise left his home church because he knew that he would not be accepted if he came out. Even during high school, Alex emotionally disengaged from the church as he heard negative narratives about LGBT people. Alex was unsure of where he "fit into Christianity." When his cousin told him about a church that affirmed gay people, Alex attended and heard a message that helped him feel reconnected to Christianity: "God said in the Bible that he's going to pour his spirit on all people...He didn't say just straight people. He said that God came with all power...not Black power, White power." From that point on, Alex shared a strong sense of community in his affirming church. This recovered access to relational capital helped to give him confidence as he progressed through school.

Pluralistic churches also helped men to recover the spiritual support that they had lost. For Isaac (traditional), religion was something that he could "always fall back on during hard times." When Isaac was forced out of his church community, he lost this



bedrock of support. Nevertheless, Isaac gained an even stronger source of spiritual support—with fewer conditions—in an affirming church community. This new community helped Isaac to see that God was someone to love rather than fear:

It was a more correct way of religion. Not just the hate. Let me show how much God loves you. I didn't get a personal thought on homosexuality and religion. I felt like I got 100 percent authentic religion. I started to see religion for a wholesome standpoint, not just from a 'let's just tell him that so he won't be gay anymore.' That's what brought me closer to God. That's what helped me to see that God isn't someone to fear, but someone to love.

Isaac once again finds religion a bedrock of support. Today, his faith motivates him to advocate for sexuality minority people in the Black communities and churches.

Many of the pluralistic churches were also distinctly *Black* churches. They had similar styles of worship, preaching and fellowship to what study men had grown up with. Through these churches, men were able to regain the racial support that they had lost in their childhood churches. Ethan drew great strength from his family church growing up. Even when society told him that he could not succeed as a young Black man, the church encouraged him that he could. So when his pastor spoke against homosexuality, he felt the sting of being “abused by his own people”:

You just sit there and have to try to take in the rest of the sermon, while disregarding the sermon he just spoke about. It's very spiritually abusive. And it's almost immediately isolating. You're sitting in church with your own people. You feel connected to these people because you're all Black and you're all Christian. So you automatically have this sense of community. And then in the instance that they say something about being gay, you're instantly isolated. You understand that you're in this thing by yourself. Especially when you see people shouting amen or agreeing with what the pastor said all around you. Even if they don't know, you know that you're a homosexual. And you're like these people are agreeing with these people around me are basically against me.

When Ethan found a Black church that affirmed his sexuality, his sense of isolation lifted. Where he had avoided making social connections at his previous church, he became fully involved in his new church community. It was incredibly important was a *Black* church:

You immediately have this sense of community, and there is no loophole, no question about it. The pastor was pretty much brought up in the same way I was. I don't know how to explain the feeling, that to find an affirming church, the pastor is also gay, has a husband, and that he is Black, that he's actually Black--he's not just a part of the culture, he understands the culture, he doesn't separate from Black people, he doesn't only date White people, he doesn't hang around with many White people, his environment is still Black. So that was an interesting development for me, for my Christianity.

Although once relatively rare, Black churches that affirm their sexual minority members are spreading across the country. National data suggests that the leaders of Black churches may be shifting more quickly towards accepting gay leaders and members than other churches (National Congregations Study 2006, 2012). Nearly two-thirds of Black Protestant churches reported accepting gay members, as opposed to less than half in 2006. Even more strikingly, the percentage of Black Protestant churches accepting gay leaders increased from 7 percent to 22 percent between 2006 and 2012. Although they are still less likely to accept sexual minority people in leadership than Mainline Protestant churches (63 percent), Black Protestant churches have grown much more quickly in their acceptance than (predominantly White) Evangelical Protestant churches (of which only 4 percent allowed sexual minority leaders in 2006 and 2012).

The emergence of affirming Black congregations and religious organizations confirms these statistical trends. Since its founding in 1982, the Unity Fellowship Church has established at least 15 congregations nationwide. Religious organizations like *Many Voices* (established in 2010) and conferences like *Soul a Fire* (inaugurated in 2000) have

likewise have facilitated positive dialogue about LGBT issues in Black churches.

Furthermore, many prominent Black religious leaders have stepped out for the cause of LGBT equality in Black churches and communities. Some of these leaders (e.g., Rev. Reggie Longcrier, Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, and Rev. Dr. Dennis Wiley) were highlighted in Chapter 3.

Pluralistic churches hold great promise for restoring the access to social capital lost by sexual minority people in non-affirming (authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional) churches. Yet, for many study men, the recovery of social capital occurred too late to benefit their high school education. Most of these men found affirming churches during college. By this time, the damage of non-affirming churches had been done as men had lost access to social capital during their high school years.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I considered the experiences of Black sexual minority men in authoritarian-patriarchal, traditional and pluralistic churches. A vast diversity in narratives existed across these categories of churches. Authoritarian-patriarchal churches combine a “Real Man” narrative and religious narratives—“It’s Not Natural”, Demon Possession and “It’s the End of the World”—to police the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity and expel members who do not meet its requirements. Traditional churches frame homosexuality as outside the natural order, but focus on restoring sexual minority members rather than expelling them<sup>211</sup>. Still, men in traditional churches often do not feel fully part of their church communities.

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<sup>211</sup> And, in some cases, they espouse forms of non-homophobic everyday theology, without providing formal theological support that sexual minority people are within the natural order.

Feeling rejected by gatekeepers (church leaders and congregants), many men in both authoritarian-patriarchal and traditional churches either leave their churches or emotionally disengage while they were in high school. These men lose access not only to relational capital, but also to cognitive and structural capital on which they had relied to guide them through school. Some men find churches that affirm their sexuality. These churches help men to develop more positive personal narratives and to recover some access to social capital (particularly relational and cognitive capital). Yet this recovery often occurs too late to help them during high school.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I investigated the role that narratives (Somers 1994) play in controlling the access of Black sexual minority men to academically-related social capital during the high school years. Narratives provide frames for understanding homosexuality and scripts that sexual minority people are expected to follow. I employed Bronfenbrenner's social ecological framework (1979) to consider how narratives operate at various levels. At the most immediate level, young people interact with gatekeepers in microsystems (including schools, families and churches). These gatekeepers include teachers, peers, parents and religious leaders. They control the young person's access to social capital in a given microsystem. The narratives that these gatekeepers hold about homosexuality shape how they react to sexual minority people. If the gatekeeper holds a negative narrative about homosexuality, he or she may react badly upon finding out or suspecting the young person is gay. Because of this poor reaction, the young person may lose access to social capital.

Rather than merely documenting the individual-level narratives of gatekeepers, I also attempted to understand how these narratives are anchored in broader sociological phenomena. Bronfenbrenner (1978) explains that an adolescent's development is influenced by factors beyond his immediate developmental setting; and Somers (1994) posits that individual level narratives are anchored within master narratives and public narratives.

Master narratives are culture-wide values, and are developed within macrosystems ("belief systems" or "bodies of knowledge" at the macro level that guide social relations in microsystems). Master narratives influence the experience of sexual

minority men in microsystems through the generation of public narratives. These narratives are generated through social networks (often comprised of sets of microsystems—i.e. mesosystems). They are public in that they are held by groups of individuals; yet, they are more limited in scope than master narratives, as they do not hold hegemonic influence over an entire society. For instance, a given public narrative may be dominant in a school, a religious group, or an ethnic or racial community. Gatekeepers draw from these public narratives in forming their own individual narratives about homosexuality.

To understand the role of gatekeeper narratives in shaping access to social capital and how these narratives are rooted in master and public narratives, I addressed three research questions:

1. What master narratives about homosexuality anchor the public narratives from which institutional gatekeepers draw to develop their individual (gatekeeper) narratives about homosexuality?
2. How do gatekeeper narratives operate across microsystems? That is, in what ways do these narratives shape reactions to study men? Specifically, what gatekeeper narratives are the most harmful in terms of blocking access to social capital?
3. How are losses in different forms of academically-related social capital related to one another?

I conducted a literature review and content analysis to identify the master and public narratives that shape gatekeeper narratives about homosexuality. I then interviewed 40 Black sexual minority men to investigate gatekeeper narratives and access to social capital at the microsystem level. Specifically, I asked study men about their interactions with gatekeepers in schools, families and churches.

**Research Question #1: What master narratives about homosexuality anchor the public narratives from which institutional gatekeepers draw to develop their individual (gatekeeper) narratives about homosexuality?**

In Chapter 2, I discussed the development of the heterosexual-homosexual binary—the master narrative addressing homosexuality in American society. This narrative arose from both religious and community narratives beginning in the first centuries CE. The Christian church adopted aspects of Platonic influence, which devalued bodies and sexuality in relation to the mind. Individuals characterized by sexual passion were not only looked down upon, but were also considered outside the natural order.

Narratives about sexuality also played a key role in the nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nationalism was based on an “imagined community” of White men. In the early twentieth century, heterosexual passion became a key characteristic first of this imagined community and later a norm for all Americans. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, the state defined homosexuals as a category of citizens who experienced passion towards members of the same sex. This group served as the binary opposite of heterosexuals. Heterosexuals were seen to serve the community good, while homosexuals threatened it. During this period, the master narrative of the heterosexual-homosexual binary solidified.

The heterosexual-homosexual binary intersects with narratives of racism not only to “doubly contain” (Hills Collins 2004) Black sexual minority men—but by silencing them within LGBT and Black communities—but also to frame public narratives about homosexuality in Black communities. Some of these public narratives are unique to

Black communities, but many of them are not. The literature review and content analysis revealed a wide range of public narratives about homosexuality that exist within Black communities. I identified three types of narratives: religious-based narratives, community-based narratives, and counternarratives (which include religious and community counternarratives, as well as individual rights-based narratives).

*Religious Narratives.* Platonized Christianity entered Black communities in the United States during the First and Second Great Awakenings (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Brown Douglas (2005) explains that Black communities were strategic in their appropriation of Christian traditions and theology. Platonic dualism contradicted the traditional African view of the body as sacred. Yet, because Black bodies had been viewed as violating the natural order (due to the racist narrative of Black hypersexuality), strict adherence to a dualistic view of the mind and body offered Black Americans the opportunity to show they were equal to their White oppressors. By denying their bodies, Black Christians would demonstrate that the sexualized stereotypes leveled against them were false. Because these stereotypes had been integral in justifying political oppression, overcoming them might also offer Black communities the opportunity for equal citizenship.

Along with the adoption of mind-body dualism, some Black religious communities accept the idea that same-sex sexual intimacy is outside the natural order. These religious communities espouse narratives such as “It’s Not Natural”, “You Can Change”, and Demon Possession that are common within American Christianity. Some Black religious communities have also adopted widely-held narratives that do not directly



address homosexuality, but serve to keep religious narratives such as “It’s Not Natural” in place. These narratives include “It’s the End of the World<sup>212</sup>” and Biblical inerrancy<sup>213</sup>.

*Community Narratives.* Experiences of racism also influenced the adoption of community narratives addressing homosexuality. Along with the appropriation of mind-body dualism, a *politics of respectability* took hold in many Black communities, in which any non-normative form of sexuality—including homosexuality—was looked upon with contempt. Similarly, the subordination of Black men throughout American history has generated narratives that alternatively uphold an idealized form of Black masculinity that emulates hegemonic masculinity (“Real Man” narrative) and that frame Black men—and Black gay men, in particular—as constantly at risk (“Plight of the Black Man” narrative). Furthermore, because Black sexual minority men have been silenced through double containment, they are sometimes framed as dangerous threats to the Black community through the moral panic of the “Down Low” narrative<sup>214</sup>.

*Counternarratives.* While religious and community narratives condemning homosexuality are present in Black communities, a number of counternarratives have also emerged. Counternarratives such as Liberation theology and Womanist theology have the ability to counteract religious narratives that frame sexual minority people as outside the natural order. These religious counternarratives may help not only Black Christians, but also American Christians more generally to accept sexual minority people. Some Black Americans adopt individual rights narratives that support the freedom of sexual minorities to live life as they choose (so long as they do not hurt anybody in the

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<sup>212</sup> The idea that the world—or groups or individuals—have a tendency towards moral decline, and homosexuality contributes to this decline

<sup>213</sup> Although as explained in Chapter 3, Biblical inerrancy need not coincide with a condemnation of homosexuality.

<sup>214</sup> White Americans are also likely to serve as the moral entrepreneurs in this panic (McCune 2014)

process). Younger generations of Black Americans may be more likely than older generations to embrace narratives such as “Born This Way” (sexual minorities should be open about their sexuality) and “Love is Love” (sexual minorities should be free to love whom they choose).

More controversial is the application of Civil Rights language to the struggle for LGBT equality. While many Black politicians support LGBT equality by using Civil Rights language, some Black Americans are hesitant to do so. This reluctance may stem in part from the marketization of the LGBT community, in which LGBT Americans have been portrayed as White and wealthy; it may also be due to the emergence of neoliberal politics into the mainstream LGBT rights movement, in which concerns for racial and socioeconomic inequality have been abandoned. Due to these and other factors, drawing parallels between the struggles for racial and LGBT equality comes off as insensitive—and potentially offensive—to some Black Americans.

While the narratives identified in Chapter 3 are not exhaustive, I hope that they add to the growing body of academic literature on the treatment of homosexuality in Black communities. Previous studies have attempted to explain the gap in acceptance of homosexuality between Black and White Americans (Lemelle & Battle 2004; Lewis 2003; Whitley, Childs & Collins 2011), but few have addressed the breadth of narratives that people within Black communities hold about homosexuality. Likewise, few have attempted to place these narratives within the historical context of master narratives about sexuality and race (but see Brown-Douglas 1999, Hills-Collins 2004).

**Research Question #2: What gatekeeper narratives are the most harmful in terms of blocking access to social capital?**

In Chapters 4 through 6, I considered how gatekeepers draw upon these public narratives in framing their view of homosexuality and reacting to study men. Study men encountered a number of narratives and counter-narratives in their schools, families and churches. Across these microsystems, two narratives emerged as the most likely to diminish men's access to academically-related social capital: the "Real Man" narrative and Biblical inerrancy. The "Real Man" narrative was harmful in that it was associated with the most extreme losses in access to social capital. Biblical inerrancy was harmful in that it was the most widespread narrative among gatekeepers in families and churches.

*Real Men.* A number of gatekeepers in each of the microsystems employed a "Real Man" narrative in framing homosexuality and reacting to study men. The "Real Man" narrative is tied to hegemonic masculinity. Much like Platonized Christianity, hegemonic masculinity rests on drawing hierarchical divisions between groups of people—men and women, White and Black, heterosexual and homosexual. It paints an idealized version of masculinity that only a small number of men can emulate. In American society, this includes neither Black nor gay men.

Failing to meet two requirements of hegemonic masculinity—Whiteness and heterosexuality—both Black and gay men<sup>215</sup> have historically found themselves outside the "imagined community" of White men and have been relegated to a lower position in the social hierarchy. The "Real Man" narrative justifies the lower social status of these men, as only real men belong to the imagined community. Black men are not real men because they are not White. Gay men are not real men because they are not

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<sup>215</sup> Along with both Black and White women

heterosexual<sup>216</sup>. Study men felt the exclusion of the “Real Man” narrative acutely in both racially-mixed spaces (such as schools), as well as predominantly Black spaces (such as families and churches).

*“Real Man” Narrative in Schools.* In schools, male peers and educators used the “Real Man” narrative to police the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity within the school community. In schools where administrators do not critically address hegemonic masculinity, it is the cultural norm. Male students who violate the requirements of hegemonic masculinity—which includes masculine self-presentation<sup>217</sup> and, above all, heterosexuality—are subject to contempt from their peers and educators. This contempt comes in the form of name-calling and bullying—and also in the failure of educators to intervene on the behalf of sexual minority students<sup>218</sup>.

When school administrators critically address hegemonic masculinity, they create welcoming environments for study men. Men in these schools have full access to relational, cognitive and structural capital at school. The majority of study men did not attend these schools. Victims to the “Real Man” narrative, these men lost access to relational capital (school belonging) as male peers and educators ostracized them. Some administrators were openly hostile to study men (as was the case with Devin), but this was often not the case. Research finds that many school administrators do not have the training to address hegemonic masculinity in schools or may fear the reaction of community member, parents and teachers if they promote school practices and policies that support LGBT students (O’Malley & Capper 2014; Marshall & Hernandez 2013).

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<sup>216</sup> And thus cannot be in a position socially dominant to a women via patriarchy

<sup>217</sup> Which may vary from school to school

<sup>218</sup> These teachers, such as those of Devin, claimed that if a student was not going to meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity then he should find another school.

Over the past decade, literature and organizations have emerged to help school administrators in addressing hegemonic masculinity and its effects on sexual minority students (Espelage & Swearer 2010; Mayberry 2006; Payne & Smith 2013). Yet, few of these resources consider how racism influences the experiences of LGBT youth of color. Many study men were “doubly contained” in their traditional high schools—neither their racial nor their sexual identities are accepted on campus. Vaught (2004) finds that schools that are not critical in their treatment of racial minority youth impose a hegemonic masculinity on Black youth and force these young men to choose racial solidarity over sexual identity and pass as straight (also Majied 2010). McCreedy (2004, 2009) finds that even when schools provide supports for LGBT students, Black sexual minority students may be left out if narratives of racism are not critically addressed. For instance, the master narrative of sexualized racism assumes that Black men are hyper-heterosexual and cannot be gay. If schools do not address this narrative, they may fail to include young Black men in their efforts to make schools a more welcoming place for sexual minority students. When hegemonic masculinity is addressed in schools, racism must be addressed as well (Craig et al. 2014).

*“Real Man” Narrative in Black Communities.* In Chapter 3, I explained that the cultural value of hegemonic masculinity entered Black communities as early as the antebellum period (when free Black men replicated White forms of patriarchy) and has continued through the Civil Rights era until today. Harper (1996) explains that historically Black men have felt the tension placed on them by hegemonic masculinity. On the one hand, hegemonic masculinity demands that all men conform to certain expectations—that they should be economically successful, White, heterosexual

patriarchs. On the other hand, hegemonic masculinity blocks Black men from meeting certain of these expectations—namely, Whiteness and in many cases economic prosperity<sup>219</sup>.

The need to live up to the ideal of the “Real Man” narrative is felt heavily by many Black men (Gates 1997; Harper 1996). Men who violate the “Real Man” narrative face not only the burden of personal failure, but also the burden of failing to uphold the good of the Black community (Neal 2015). This burden weighed on study men and their gatekeepers in families and churches alike. Isaac recalls the pressure to be a “Real Man”:

You have to be masculine. You have to be on top. You have to be head of the pack. It's been that way since time began. You have to be a leader...to be a man. You have to be this to be a man. Then to be Black, it makes it harder. You experience other tensions, other hardships that other races might not. Being a Black man, we get it harsher than most. Then being gay on top of that, it's like oh hell...you're gay, Black and a man. What are we going to do? When you're gay that's when you get attacked for being the wrong kind of man. In the Black community, you get frowned on by your own people. That's what makes it harder, by your own people.

Hegemonic masculinity—and the “Real Man” narrative that upholds it—had negative effects on study men in their families and churches. In families, some parents employ the “Real Man” narrative in responding to their son’s sexuality. These parents—often fathers—feel pressure within their racial communities to demonstrate their own masculinity<sup>220</sup>. Having a sexual minority son threatens their performance of hegemonic masculinity (Solebello & Elliott 2011)—and thus possibly their standing within the community, particularly among other men. Some parents of study men reacted in an authoritarian manner when they learned their son was a sexual minority person. They used physical force, in some cases, to dictate that their son would not be gay. Others cut

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<sup>219</sup> Due to structural racism

<sup>220</sup> In the case of mothers, there may be pressure to uphold hegemonic masculinity.

off contact with their sons for a time. Out of embarrassment, they avoided mentioning their sons within the community.

In authoritarian-patriarchal churches, religious leaders use the “Real Man” narrative to police the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity within their religious community (mirroring the same phenomenon in school communities). Unlike in schools, religious leaders join the “Real Man” narrative with a number of religious narratives that justified the expulsion of sexual minorities from the community. Only real men belong the sacred space of the church.

Hegemonic masculinity causes hierarchical divisions within Black families and churches—between heterosexual and homosexual men as well as between men and women (Davis 1983; Hills-Collins 2004; hooks 2004)—disadvantaging those at the lower end of the hierarchy (i.e., women and sexual minority men). For this reason, some commentators call on Black Americans to abandon the cultural value of hegemonic masculinity. Brown and Clark (2003) for instance question the appropriation of hegemonic masculinity within Black communities as it mirrors racial oppression: “By using whiteness as a model, black men replicate the same systems of oppression in which they are also victimized” (p.735). hooks (2004) calls for the creation of “life-sustaining visions of a reconstructed Black masculinity” (p. 113) that eschew patriarchy and work for the common good of all Black men and women. Byrd (2001) similarly calls upon Black men to resist patriarchy and any form of masculinity that would “emasculate” (p. 22) Black men who do not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. sexual minority men).

In terms of public narratives, one response to hegemonic masculinity is intersectionality. Rather than privileging one form of masculinity as superior to others, intersectionality equally values the experiences of men with multiple identities—some of which do not align with hegemonic masculinity. A man can be both authentically Black *and* gay (Bowleg 2013). The notion of the common good is expanded beyond upholding the ideal of the “Real Man” narrative, and instead includes the good of all men (and women). In this way, the divisions caused by hegemonic masculinity that have disadvantaged both racial and sexual minority people throughout American history are not replicated within Black communities. Hutchison (1999) echoes community members and leaders like Rev. Dr. Dennis Wiley in Chapter 3, emphasizing the need to include sexual minority men in a new vision of the common good of the Black community:

In time, more gay Black men will come out of the closet, and more heterosexual Black men will meet them, get to know them better, and in some cases, discover that they have known them all along. This will force homophobic heterosexual Black men to re-examine their own faulty definitions of manhood and confront their own homophobia. My hope is that heterosexual Black men will come to realize that they should be the last ones in America to jettison other Blacks who may be in a position to make valuable contributions to the struggle for political and economic empowerment. It took some time for me to learn this, but I did, because I no longer wanted my gay problem to be my Black problem (p. 305).

Many study men took brave steps not only in accepting their sexuality, but also towards advocating for a new vision of the common good—one that transcends the constraints of hegemonic masculinity. Darien, Carter, Christopher, and Clayton each worked with the Black Student Unions on their college campuses to promote the inclusion of LGBT issues in political discussions pertinent to the Black community. Although this was a difficult task—especially at first—each of these men experienced successes. Their Black classmates began to accept their sexuality and to understand the



importance of acknowledging the issues of Black sexual minority men and women on campus as distinctly *Black* issues. Within each of these groups a new, more inclusive vision of the common good of Black communities was created. These visions did not rest on the hierarchical divisions of hegemonic masculinity; they considered the needs of all Black students—male, female, gay and straight.

*Biblical Inerrancy.* The most common narrative in the families and churches of study men was Biblical inerrancy. Many parents and religious leaders invoked Biblical inerrancy in telling study men “you know what the Bible says” about homosexuality. Inerrancy in these cases involved more than placing a high value on the Biblical text. These narratives also uphold a particular vision of sexuality influenced by Platonized Christianity. In this dualism, homosexuals are categorized as non-believers, and are thus at risk of going to hell (i.e. narrative of personal destruction). A number of Biblical texts—notably, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10—are used to support this view.

When parents and religious leaders invoked Biblical inerrancy, they often did so out of concern for the study man. Some parents and religious leaders employed a “You Can Change” narrative in offering hope to study men that they could be restored to the natural order by resisting their homosexuality<sup>221</sup>. Yet, study men often took this concern as rejection. Unlike parents and religious leaders, they often knew—or came to realize over time—that they could not change their sexual orientation. As a result of this divergence in understanding, study men who encountered the narrative of Biblical inerrancy often lost access to relational capital in both their homes and churches.

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<sup>221</sup> By becoming heterosexual or by at least avoiding same-sex relationships or identifying as a sexual minority person

The use of the Bible to condemn sexual minority people in Black religious communities represents a paradox. Since the time of slavery, the Bible has served as a source of hope and liberation for many Black Americans (even when their White oppressors used the Bible to uphold slavery). Yet, some Black religious communities also use the Bible to condemn the sexual minority people in their congregations. Brown Douglas (2006) explains that Black communities have historically chosen their particular interpretations of Biblical text through their “own experiences of struggle” (p. 1) in a racist society. The decision to adopt Platonized Christianity, for instance, was borne out of a struggle to grapple with the effects of sexualized racism. Yet, it also opened up Black religious communities to Biblical interpretations that condemned sexual minority people (including sexual minority people in their congregations).

Brown Douglas (2006) calls these Biblical interpretations “traditions of terror” (p. 1) in that they have had a highly negative effect on sexual minority people throughout Christian history. Along with other gay-affirming theologians like Dr. Peter Gomes and Rev. Dr. Delman Coates mentioned in Chapter 3, she laments the fact that some Black religious communities use these interpretive traditions to condemn sexual minorities much in the same way that White Americans used Biblical texts to condemn them in the past. These theologians believe that the Bible should continue to be valued in Black religious communities. Nevertheless, texts that are used to condemn social marginalized groups—such as LGBT people—should be viewed with a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Brown Douglas 2006, p. 1). Brown Douglas suggests that this hermeneutic should be based on the question that has always been central to biblical interpretation in Black religious communities: *Does the text support the life and freedom of all Black people?*

Because “traditions of terror<sup>222</sup>” do not support the life and freedom of Black sexual minority people, Brown Douglas believes that these interpretations should be questioned. This questioning will not likely happen through critical scholarship alone, some scholars believe. Ward (2005) explains that Black religious communities are generally distrustful of critical scholarship that comes from White religious communities. Furthermore, Black religious communities have a rich, oral tradition of passing down Biblical interpretations from one generation to the next (Weems 1991).

Challenges to both “traditions of terror” and to Platonized Christianity may be more likely to unfold through dialogue in Black churches and communities (Brown Douglas 2006). This dialogue might include addressing the negative effect that Biblical interpretations have on Black sexual minority people in families and churches. It might also address this historical role that American Christianity has played in demeaning Black bodies and sexuality—including the use of the Bible to support racism and the barring of Black Americans from full citizenship. In doing so, Black religious communities may come to question the influence of Platonic dualism on Western and Black Christianity. At the same time, these communities may move away from Biblical interpretations that condemn sexual minority people. Brown Douglas (2006) explains:

Black well-being is not fostered by adopting the oppressive, destructive, life-negating tools of White culture. We must promote acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity—even sexual diversity—within the Black community. In so doing, we can empower Black men and women to disavow and dismantle the structures, systems, and ways of behaving or thinking that foster homophobia, and destroy our communities (p. 1).

Many parents of study men (such as those of Christopher and Jamal mentioned in Chapter 5) appear to have used the “hermeneutic of suspicion” that Brown Douglas

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<sup>222</sup> Such as interpretations of 1 Corinthians 1:6-9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 which teach that sexual minorities will go to hell

promotes. Their experiences with their sexual minority sons made them question the traditional Biblical interpretations to which they adhered. They saw the negative effects that religious condemnation had on their sons and other sexual minority people in their lives (often friends of their sons), and they set these interpretations aside. They continued to value the Bible, while at the same time accepting their children.

**Research Question #3: How are losses in different forms of academically-related social capital related to one another?**

When invoked by gatekeepers, narratives such as “Real Man” and Biblical inerrancy resulted the loss of access to social capital for study men in their schools, families and churches. Study men lost access to relational capital when they felt that they no longer belonged in a microsystem because of rejection by gatekeepers. Some men also lost access to cognitive capital (e.g. academic motivation, spiritual support) or structural capital (e.g. classroom instruction, academic resources in the home). The patterns of social capital loss varied across microsystems, but shared some similarities.

In schools, men lost access to relational capital when male peers and educators invoked the “Real Man” narrative. They never devalued academic work (cognitive capital), but sometimes they experienced situational depression due to rejection, which diminished their ability to focus on schoolwork. In other cases, men lost access to structural capital as they feared going to class or engaging in relationships with teachers who had rejected them. Other times, men lost access to structural capital when they were temporarily removed from the school community for defending themselves from homophobic bullies. Some men transferred to schools that were more accepting of their sexuality and their access to social capital was restored.

In families, men lost access to relational capital when they were rejected—or felt rejected—by their parents. Although some parents struggled to imagine a future for their son, in no case did they give up on the belief that he would succeed in school. Neither did study men abandon the value on academics that they shared with their parents. As with rejection in schools, parental rejection often led study men to feel depressed, which inhibited their ability to focus on schoolwork (cognitive capital). In rare cases, men lost access to structural capital when their parents no longer engaged in their schooling (during a period of silence or avoidance after he came out) or they were pushed out of their homes (and thus lost access to resources in the home). Often parents came to accept their son's sexuality over time and his access to relational capital was restored. The time that it took for this recovery to occur depended both on the narrative held by the parent and on the amount of community pressure placed on the parent to maintain a negative narrative.

Almost universally, men lost access to relational capital in churches, regardless of whether the church's narratives about homosexuality focused on expulsion (authoritarian-patriarchal) or conversion (traditional). Men took both as rejection, and most either left or emotionally disengaged from their churches. As a result, men lost access to structural capital (leadership opportunities, cross-generational ties and network closure). Many men also lost the spiritual and racial support they had once found in their individual churches and in Christianity more generally. Some men recovered access to social capital when they found their way to pluralistic churches that embraced their sexuality. Most often, however, this recovery did not occur until after high school.

The clearest trend across microsystems was that the loss of access to cognitive and structural capital was often indirect. Study men initially lost access to relational capital when they felt rejected at school, home or church. This rejection caused them to feel depressed, which diminished their ability to focus on academic work<sup>223</sup>. Still, study men did not value academic work less. Ultimately, they hoped to succeed in school, even though their future was temporarily clouded by gatekeeper rejection.

This finding indicates that gatekeepers who affirm the sexuality of Black sexual minority men may play an important role not only in helping men to accept themselves but also in helping them to focus on schoolwork again. In many cases, when gatekeepers intervened in the lives of study men with positive narratives, men were able to envision a better future and improved their academic performance. This was the case for the supportive teachers at Garrett's school and at the school to which Jarrett transitioned. If not for the intervention of these gatekeepers, study men may not have had the same success in school that they did.

Another reason that study men succeeded despite losses in access to social capital was their resilience. Luthar and colleagues (2000) define resilience as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). Developmental researchers have found that a number of personality traits—including sociability (Werner 2001), resourcefulness (Werner 1993), and planfulness (Clausen 1993; Furnham, Crump & Whelan 1997; Werner & Smith 1992)—are associated with resilience. Study men embodied each of these traits.

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<sup>223</sup> Previous research indicates that men who lose access to relational capital often feel depressed (Almeida et al. 2009; Bauermeister et al. 2010; Detrie & Lease 2008), but few studies have related this depression to academic work (but see Pearson & Wilkinson 2009).

Many of the men, for instance, maintained broad social networks in school, even when they were rejected by some of their peers and teachers (i.e. sociability). Men who are not as sociable might have isolated themselves when they experienced rejection. A number of study men also used resources to find support (i.e. resourcefulness). Men like Eddie and Anthony used resources that were available inside (e.g. mentors) and outside (e.g. LGBT organizations) school to improve their school's response to sexual minority students (e.g. through teacher sensitivity training, founding gay-straight alliances).

Finally, many study men exhibited planfulness in that they had specific academic goals, which they were determined to achieve despite obstacles. Will and Jesse, for instance, each determined that they would obtain their doctoral degrees. Likewise, men like Clayton and Terrance held out hope for a brighter future when they reached college. Nevertheless, because of structural racism, the hope that "it will get better" (Savage & Miller 2011) in college may seem out of reach to many Black sexual minority men<sup>224</sup> (Kozol 2005; Oakes & Rogers 2006; Orfield et al. 2002). Helping Black sexual minority men to find resilience during the high school years may be aided by ensuring that all Black Americans have access to higher education.

Apart from these personality traits, study men's experiences growing up as racial minorities may have formed resilience in their character (Follins, Walker & Lewis 2014). Study men had to learn how to celebrate themselves as Black men in communities that devalued their Blackness. In turn, they were able to accept their sexuality when they received rejection from within the Black community and in microsystems such as school.

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<sup>224</sup> In 2014, 22.4 percent of Black young adults (25-29) had earned a Bachelor's Degree compared to 40.8 percent of White young adults. (National Center for Education Statistics 2014).

Understanding how Black sexual minority men develop resilience in the face of negative gatekeeper reactions is an important topic for future study.

### **Previous Literature and Future Research**

This dissertation adds to the literature in a number of ways. While many studies of LGBT youth have focused within microsystems, few have looked at mesosystems (how experiences in one microsystem influence experiences in another). Likewise few studies have specifically considered how experiences relating to sexuality in other microsystems might influence experiences in school (but see Ryan 2009, 2010). I made an initial effort by explaining how access to academically-related social capital at home and in church is influenced by gatekeeper narratives and reactions to men's sexuality.

This dissertation also adds to the growing body of literature on the experiences of *Black* sexual minority men in schools, families and churches. My findings align with some previous studies of Black sexual minority men, while they differ from other studies. While a great deal of research exists on Black sexual minority within the public health literature, few studies focus on the experiences of these men in high school. These studies indicate that Black sexual minority men are both likely to be harassed or bullied for their sexual orientation or gender non-conformity by their classmates (Diaz & Kosciw 2009) and to be excluded from LGBT support groups because of their race (McCready 2004, 2009). This study confirms the findings of Diaz and Kosciw (2009), yet attempts to account for the divergent experiences of men who are and who are not harassed or bullied in high school. I proposed hegemonic masculinity (and the "Real Man" narrative) as one possible explanation. Although I did not directly address men's experience of race in



LGBT support groups, men's experiences of "double containment" (Hills-Collins 2004) within some traditional schools mirror the findings of McCready (2004, 2009).

Likewise, few studies have investigated the experiences of Black sexual minority men in their families. Two studies (Murray et al. 2001; LaSala & Frierson 2012) indicate that fear of their son's double minority status drives parent's hesitance to accept their son's sexuality. I found that this fear plays a primary role for some parents but not for all. Biblical inerrancy, for instance, was the most widely held concern amongst parents. Hussen and colleagues (2014) find a range of relationships between fathers and their sexual minority<sup>225</sup> sons. Some men shared strong relationships with their fathers, while some were estranged. I also found that study men experienced a range of relationships with both their mothers and their fathers. Based on the parent's narrative and reaction, some men had full access to relational capital after coming out while some men did not for a period of time.

Previous studies of Black sexual minority men in churches paint a divergent picture. Pitt (2009, 2010) finds that Black gay and bisexual men are able to negotiate their religious and sexual identities in congregations that do not affirm homosexuality (also see Jeffries, Dodge & Sandfort 2008). In doing so, they are able to remain at churches, with some even holding positions of leadership. Miller (2007), on the other hand, finds that many Black sexual minority men leave their churches based on teachings that condemn homosexuality. My findings more closely resembled those of Miller (2007). Whether churches were virulent or conciliatory in their non-affirmation of homosexuality, men tended to feel rejected and either left or emotionally disengaged from church. Finally, Ward (2005) finds that churches are a significant source of

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<sup>225</sup> Men who have sex with men

hypermasculinity and homophobia within Black communities. I found that this was the case for some churches that men attended (authoritarian-patriarchal churches), but not for all churches. Many churches that disapproved of homosexuality (i.e. traditional churches) did not promote hypermasculinity. Still others (i.e. pluralistic churches) both eschewed hypermasculinity and approved of homosexuality.

The findings of this dissertation should be viewed in light of a number of limitations that I mentioned in the introductory chapter and in Appendix A. These include a sample that includes only men who were academically successful (even though many faced setbacks), the reliance on study men's self-report of experiences in microsystems, and my status as both an insider and an outsider to the experiences of the study men.

This project also opens up a number of additional research questions and topics that may be investigated in the future. For instance, a future project could include a sample of men with more diverse education outcomes (i.e. more men who did not complete high school) in order to see how academically-related social capital shapes the academic outcomes of men who are at high risk for dropping out. Future research might also focus on the role of personal narratives in the lives of sexual minority men. For instance, how do personal narratives influence the decision of sexual minority men to come out to gatekeepers? And how do the personal narratives interact with gatekeeper narratives to shape gatekeeper reactions and access to social capital?

Future research might also include interviews of gatekeepers. Gatekeepers could be asked in greater detail about the narratives they held about homosexuality before and after sexual minority men came out and about the process of changing narratives. Finally, studies should focus on intersectional experiences of racism and heterosexism

amongst racial minority LGBT people. In this dissertation, I focused primarily on experiences of heterosexism because these experiences were more pertinent to the research questions. Nevertheless, a greater focus on the intersectionality of race and sexuality would likely paint a fuller picture of the lives of young, Black sexual minority men.

In this study, I found that a wide variety of public narratives about homosexuality exist within Black communities and the wider American culture that respond to the master narrative of the heterosexual-homosexual binary. Gatekeepers in schools, families and churches drew on some of these narratives (e.g. “Real Man”, Biblical inerrancy) in reacting to study men. When study men lost access to social capital, they typically lost access relational capital first, sometimes followed by cognitive and structural capital. Academic work was most clearly affected through situational depression based on the loss of relational capital. Even though many men lost access to social capital, all of the men I interviewed were successful in school. This success might be attributed to the intervention of gatekeepers at critical points and to the resilience of the study men.

## Appendix A: Methodology

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how gatekeeper narratives influence the access of Black sexual minority men to academically-related social capital in various microsystems—schools, families, churches—as they work toward finishing high school. The dissertation involved three analytical tasks: identifying master narratives, identifying public narratives, and interviewing men about their experiences in microsystems (including the gatekeeper narratives and reactions that they encountered).

*Identifying Master Narratives.* I first identified two master narratives relevant to the experiences of Black sexual minority men: the homosexual-heterosexual binary and racism. Somers (1994) explains that master narratives have a quality of denarrativization—that is, they rely on concepts that are stripped of any historical context. Master narratives are simply taken as the way things are, and do not account for the social forces that put them into place. In Chapter 2, I relied on literature that addresses the homosexual-heterosexual binary and racism from a historical perspective. I specifically focused on work that shows how social dominant groups constructed these master narratives throughout Western history.

*Identifying Public Narratives.* I next identified a set of public narratives that either accept or reject the premises of the heterosexual-homosexual binary. I focused specifically on public narratives addressing homosexuality that exist within Black communities. Most of these narratives are not unique to Black communities, but some derive from the intersection of master narratives about both sexuality and race in American society. I took a two-part approach to identifying these public narratives. First, I relied on literature about discussion of homosexuality within Black communities. From

this review of the literature, I identified a number of public narratives. Second, I consulted a number of primary sources, including messages from religious leaders community leaders (e.g. politicians), and community members. Figures A.1 through A.3 show the primary source databases that I constructed.

<i>Figure A.1. Religious Leaders Database</i>	
Sermons and Religious Messages	Sermons and messages from 138 religious leaders that cover LGBT issues from five major religious groups: Pentecostal denominations (Church of God in Christ, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God in the Americas); Methodist denominations (African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church); Baptist denominations (National Baptist Convention USA, Progressive National Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of America Inc.), Southern Baptist Convention; other Christian denominations (non-denominational churches, para-church organizations); and non-Christian groups (Nation of Islam, African Restorationist religion). These sermons and messages were delivered or written between the years 2002 and 2014. I obtained these sermons and religious texts through an independent Internet search.

<i>Figure A.2. Community Leaders Database</i>	
Federal-Level Politics	Voting records of 78 Black members of Congress from the 107th session (2001-2002) to the 113th session (2013-2014), as they related to the following topics: same-sex marriage, adoption, non-discrimination for LGBT students and workers, LGBT people in the military, and tax benefits for same-sex couples. Political speeches and press releases from the years 1996 to 2014 provided by these member of Congress. I also analyzed messages from four Black members of the executive branch of the federal government (President Barack Obama; Attorney General Eric Holder; Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson; and Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx) and two Black governors (Deval Patrick and David Paterson) concerning rights for LGBT individuals and couples. These statements were delivered between 2012 and 2014.
Local Politics	Political statements of 28 Black mayors of cities larger than 100,000 in population. These statements were delivered between 2012 and 2014. News stories about city-level political efforts to

	protect to protect or diminish the rights of LGBT citizens (with a specific focus on the role of Black city council members in these political efforts).
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<i>Figure A.3. Community Members Database</i>	
Media Commentary	Commentary from 117 readers of online publications that focus on issues facing Black communities ( <i>The Grio</i> ; <i>Madame Noire</i> ; <i>The Root</i> ; <i>Essence</i> ; and <i>Colorlines</i> ). This commentary was published between 2012 and 2015.
Radio Commentary	Commentary from listeners of the following popular radio shows that focus on issues facing Black communities: (Joe Madison (WOL-AM); Rob Redding (GCN); Warren Ballentine, George Wilson and Al Sharpton (Syndication One); Derrick Boazman and Andre Eggellton (WAOK-AM), as well as a radio show discussing LGBT issues in Black communities (Black, White and Gay in America)

To analyze these primary sources, I wrote a memo for each primary source. In these memos, I recorded my initial thoughts about frames and scripts that might be present within the source (sometimes multiple frames and scripts were present). If a frame and script reflected a narrative that I had encountered in my review of the literature, I classified it as representing that narrative. For the remainder of frames and scripts, I used a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). I looked for patterns in frames and scripts across primary sources. I then attempted to identify these narratives (by giving them a name) and to categorize them among the narratives that I had encountered in the literature review. In chapter 3, I selected quotes from primary sources that reflect these narratives.

There are two primary limitations to relying on these primary resources to identify public narratives, rather than interviewing religious leaders, community leader, and community members. First, I was not able to ask any probing questions about whether

what was conveyed actually reflected a given frame or script. Second, not all authors or speakers self-identified as Black. For instance, the racial identification of radio callers and online commentators was sometimes unknown (except when they made this clear in their dialogue or comment). Nevertheless, each of the media outlets included in the analysis represents a center for discourse within Black communities (i.e. Black churches, Black news sites). I thus chose to include sources even when the racial identity of the speaker or author was not known.

*Understanding the Role of Gatekeeper Narratives in Access to Social Capital.* My primary research task in this dissertation was to investigate how gatekeeper narratives (the public narratives from which gatekeepers draw) influence reactions to sexual minority men and—ultimately—men’s access to academically-related social capital. I conducted interviews with 40 Black sexual minority men to understand these relationships. Study men met the following criteria:

- *They identified as Black* (or African American, African or Afro-Caribbean)
- *They had a non-heterosexual orientation.* Sample members used a number of terms to identify their sexual orientation (e.g. gay, bisexual, same-gender loving), but each sample member reported attraction to members of the same sex.
- *They were cisgender.* Studying the experiences of transgender men and women is an immensely valuable line of research. Nevertheless, due to myriad differences between the life experiences between transgender and cisgender sexual minority men, I chose to limit this study to cisgender individuals.

- *They were between the ages of 18 and 29.* I limited the sample to men over the age of 18 to capture those who had completed their secondary education (whether or not they had attained a high school degree or equivalent). I limited the sample to men 29 or younger because public narratives about homosexuality—and thus gatekeeper narratives and reactions—have likely changed over time.

I aimed to recruit participants from locations that were spatially diverse, in terms of both region and urbanicity. Support for sexual minority individuals varies greatly by both dimensions. For instance, the experience of an adolescent in Alabama may be markedly different from man living in California, which has protective laws from LGBT students and a generally more liberal atmosphere. Likewise, an adolescent living in rural Georgia may have much more limited access to LGBT resources than a student living in urban Atlanta. Figure 4 provides a demographic description of the interview participants.

*Figure A.4. Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants*

Name	Region	Primary Caretaker(s)
Isaac	South, Rural	Mother
Alex	South, Urban	Mother
Owen	West, Urban	Mother
Andre	South, Rural	Father
Joseph	South, Suburban	Aunt, Uncle
Ethan	South, Suburban	Mother
Isaiah	South, Urban	Mother, Father
Fred	South, Urban	Mother
Joshua	South, Urban	Mother, Father
Cameron	West, Suburban	Mother, Father
Xavier	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Mother, Father
Drake	Midwest, Urban	Mother
Elijah	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Mother



Jarrett	South, Suburban	Mother
Bryan	South, Rural	Mother, Sister
Devin	South, Rural	Mother, Father
James	South, Suburban	Mother, Father
Kendrick	South, Urban	Father
Clayton	Midwest, Urban	Mother
Will	West, Urban	Mother
Jesse	Midwest, Urban	Mother, Father
Eddie	South, Urban	Mother, Father
Marcus	South, Urban	Mother, Father
Austin	South, Rural	Mother
Jamal	South, Rural	Mother, Father
Ben	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Grandmother
Garrett	Mid-Atlantic, Rural	Mother, Father
Anthony	Northeast, Suburban	Godparents
Maurice	Midwest, Urban	Father
Darien	West, Suburban	Mother
Jonathan	Midwest, Urban	Mother
Carter	West, Suburban	Mother
Tyler	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Mother
Nathan	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Mother
Christopher	Mid-Atlantic, Urban	Mother
Jayden	Mid-Atlantic, Rural	Mother
Michael	Midwest, Urban	Mother
Jeff	South, Rural	Mother, Father
William	South, Urban	Mother
Terrance	South Africa	Mother

*Procedures.* Interviews took place over the phone or in-person and generally lasted between one and two hours. I began the interview by asking for the life story of the young man, in order to understand his personal narrative about his own sexuality and to identify probing questions for later discussion of experiences in school, home and church. For the remainder of the interview, I asked study men about their experiences in these microsystems. Typically, I started by asking study men about their experiences in school, and then families and church. When I sensed that men wanted to share a particular experience first—e.g. an experience that they had with their parent or religious leader—I rearranged the order of the interview. The interview was semi-structured, in that I had a

series of questions prepared to ask (an interview protocol) but the ordering of these questions and specific probes varied across interviews.

The interview protocol included six sections. I first asked study men a series of demographic questions (where and with whom they grew up before and during high school, what high school(s) they attended, and whether they attended a church before and during high school). I then asked study men a series of questions about each of the three microsystems: school, family and church. For school, I asked about the narratives of peers and teachers, how peers and teachers treated sexual minority and gender non-conforming students generally, how peers and teachers reacted if the study man came out at school, and the types of support that study men had from teachers before and after coming out. For family, I asked about the narratives of study men's primary caretakers, how caretakers reacted if the study man came out at home, and the types of support that study men had at home before and after coming out. For church, I asked about the narratives of religious leaders and other congregants, how religious leaders treated sexual minority and gender non-conforming congregants generally, how religious leaders and congregants reacted if the study man came out at church, and the types of support that study men had at church before and after coming out. I also asked men about their involvement in LGBT organizations, as these organizations may serve as an additional source of support (particularly when support is lost in other microsystems). Finally, I asked men about their post-secondary education, work, and current involvement in the LGBT community.

A methodological limitation of the study is that I asked men to report not only on their own experiences, but also on the narratives and reactions of gatekeepers. There is a

possibility that study men remember these interactions differently that gatekeepers would—and thus interview data only tell one perspective. Nevertheless, interactions with gatekeepers as remembered by study men are the most important as their perceptions of gatekeeper acceptance versus rejection play the primary role in shaping their access to social capital. For instance, study men lost access to relational capital when they felt rejected by teachers, peers, parents or religious leaders. The intentions of gatekeepers mattered, but primarily as perceived by the study men.

I tape-recorded the interviews and recorded field notes after each conversation. I transcribed interviews, using MaxQDA software to analyze the transcripts. I employed a selective coding scheme (Corbin & Strauss 2008) in order to draw out four thematic areas from the interviews: (1) gatekeeper narratives in each microsystem; (2) the reactions of gatekeepers to the study within each microsystem, if he came out; (3) the access to social capital that men had in each microsystem prior to coming out; (4) the access to social capital that men had in each microsystem after coming out. I then used axial coding to understand the relationships between these themes for each microsystem.

*IRB Relevant Information.* Before I began each interview, I obtained the signed informed consent of the interviewee to be both interviewed and tape-recorded. I ensured the interviewee that everything shared would be kept confidential. After the interview, I assigned the interviewee a pseudonym, which I used when transcribing the interview. I also assigned pseudonyms for any persons or places that were mentioned during the interview. Some risks were associated with the interview. For instance, negative experiences within schools, families, or churches might have been difficult for the interviewee to discuss. Before the interview, I instructed the interviewee that they should

only respond to questions that they feel comfortable discussing. I reminded them of this throughout the interview. In the case that any social service need of the interviewee had been apparent at the conclusion of the interview (e.g. mental or physical health needs), I had prepared a list of LGBT-friendly service providers with whom I could put the interviewee in contact.

I informed the study men that they would not benefit directly from the interview. Meanwhile, I shared that their responses would help researchers to understand the experiences of Black sexual minority men as they transition to adulthood and to provide suggestions for how harmful narratives about sexuality might be addressed. I stored interview audio files on a password-protected hard drive. I will keep interview audio files and electronic files of the transcripts on the password-protected hard drive and any printed transcripts and field notes in a locked storage file and I will destroy these files after a period of three years.

## Appendix B: Categorizing Narratives

Narratives about homosexuality fall into one of three categories: religious narratives; community narratives; and individual rights narratives. Each of these narrative categories relies on a type of “moral ethic” (Haidt 2012; Rozin et al. 1999; Shweder 1999). Religious-based narratives rely on a divinity ethic in formulating frames and scripts; community-based narratives rely on a community ethic; and individual rights-based narratives rely on an autonomy ethic.

Distinguishing these narrative categories is important. Psychological literature suggests that each type of moral ethic is associated with a different emotional reaction when it is violated (Rozin et al. 1999). In terms of this study, violating the script of different categories of narratives may result in a different type of emotional reaction from gatekeepers. These reactions have implications for the social capital to which men have access in various microsystems (schools, families and churches). In the following section, I discuss each moral ethic on which each narrative category is based, the emotion a gatekeeper might experience when a narrative based in this moral ethic is violated, and how gatekeepers using these ethics/narratives might react to sexual minority people. Figure B.1 displays each narrative category along with its associated moral ethic, as well as the expected reactions to violators of narratives (including sexual minority people).

<i>Figure B.1. Narrative Categories, Moral Ethics, and Reactions</i>			
	Moral Ethic	Emotion toward Violator of Narrative	Reaction to Sexual Minorities
Religious-Based Narratives	<i>Divinity Ethic:</i> Focused on upholding the connection between humanity and divinity by uphold the natural order	Sociomoral Disgust	Expulsion of sexual minority people from group

Community-Based Narratives	<i>Community Ethic:</i> Focused on upholding the common good of the social group	Contempt	Exclusion of sexual minority people from group
Individual Rights-Based Narratives	<i>Autonomy Ethic:</i> Focused on promoting liberty and preventing harm to individuals	Anger at those who prohibit rights of sexual minority people	Acceptance of sexual minority people

### Divinity Ethic

According to Haidt, the divinity ethic assumes that human bodies are “temporary vessels” (2012, p. 117) in which a divine soul exists. People are not merely more emotionally and rationally developed animals. Instead, they are related to divinity (e.g. “children of God” in Christianity), and are required to behave accordingly. The body is a “temple” and is thus sacred rather than profane, in Durkheimian (1915) terms. Even if a person’s actions do not harm anyone, they may still be considered a moral violation if they violate the sacredness of the body. The “natural order”, as established by the deity of a given religion (and integrated into the worldview of the religious group) is what connects human bodies to the divine and makes it possible for humans to escape mortality<sup>226</sup> (Beck 2011; Haidt 2012) Violations of the natural order break this connection, and are thus viewed as “sins” by adherents of the religious group. What defines the natural order differs across religious and cultural groups. In Western society, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, same-sex sexuality has come to be viewed as a violation of the natural order.

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<sup>226</sup> Whereas the profane is tied to the mortality and animal nature of humans

Violations of the natural order are met with sociomoral disgust (Beck 2011; Haidt 2012; Rozin et al. 1999). Psychologists distinguish sociomoral disgust from core disgust. Beck (2011) explains that core disgust is an evolutionary development to protect humans from contaminating or unclean substances (e.g. feces, rotten food). For example, humans may experience disgust when they come into contact with substances that would be poisonous if consumed. Disgust is partially subject to a process of socialization. Society teaches its young members what substances are to be avoided. During this process of socialization, disgust can be taught towards target other than food—namely, people. The socialization of sociomoral disgust relies on religious-based narratives. Connecting sociomoral disgust to elements of core disgust via metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 2008)<sup>227</sup>, these narratives socialize young people to experience disgust towards people who violate the natural order. Just as contact with a contaminating substance can threaten one's physical well-being, contact with a person who violates the natural order may threaten one's spiritual well-being (i.e. their ability to connect with the divine) (Beck 2011). In Western societies, this includes sexual minority people. Psychological literature indicates that sociomoral disgust is related to many Americans' explicit (Tapias et al. 2007) and implicit attitudes (Inbar & Pizarro 2009; Inbar et al. 2012) towards sexual minorities.

Two aspects of disgust psychology shed light on how gatekeepers who adopt religious-based narratives regarding homosexuality might react to sexual minority people, Beck (2011) explains. First, disgust is a boundary psychology. From a psychological standpoint, disgust draws and monitors interpersonal boundaries. Similar to core disgust, sociomoral disgust is triggered when the unclean (or contaminated) person crosses a

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<sup>227</sup> Haidt (2001) explains: "Moral intuition...appears to be the automatic output of an underlying, largely unconscious set of interlinked moral concepts. These concepts may have some innate basis...which is then built up largely by metaphorical extensions from physical experience" (p. 825).

boundary and comes into contact with a group identified as clean. In this case, sexual minorities (as violators of the natural order) are the unclean person (Beck 2011)<sup>228</sup>. People who adopt religious-based narratives about homosexuality may cut off their contact with a sexual minority person, thus reducing that person's access to relational capital. Beyond functioning on boundary psychology, disgust also involves expulsive psychology (Beck 2011). It not only creates and monitors boundaries, but also compels narrative holder to push away unclean object forcefully. Religious groups who believe that homosexuality violates the natural order may adopt narratives that homosexual people should be expelled from sacred spaces. This may result in forcing sexual minority youth out of churches (and perhaps also religious homes). Religious-based narratives may thus significantly reduce the youth's access to both relational and structural capital in these microsystems.

### Community Ethic

According to Haidt (2012), the community ethic is based on the idea that people are part of larger social groups (e.g. families, racial/ethnic communities, nations). These groups are more than the sum of their individual parts, and must be protected by group members. Individuals thus have an obligation to play their assigned role to uphold the “common good” of the community. In American society, master narratives about sexuality have been based on an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of White, property-owning men. In Chapter 2, I discuss how nationalism arose as a way to protect this “imagined community” of Americans. One element of nationalism—hegemonic masculinity—contributed to the master narrative of a heterosexual-homosexual binary in

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<sup>228</sup> Certain people are more prone to need for boundaries, and are thus more prone to disgust (Haidt 2012; Haidt, McCauley & Rozin 1994; Inbar, Pizarro & Bloom 2009)



American society. According to this narrative, heterosexual people are “normal” and are most able to contribute to the good of society. Sexual minorities are “abnormal”, and fail to contribute to the common good.

Group-based narratives operate on hierarchies (Haidt 2012). Certain members of society—those at the top of the social hierarchy<sup>229</sup>—are best able to meet the requirements of these narratives (i.e. contribute to the common good). In a society that values hegemonic masculinity, as has does the United States, a heterosexual man contributes the most to the common good both by procreating and by leading his family unit. Sexual minority men fail to contribute to common goods of both procreation and patriarchy. As a result of these shortcomings, they are treated with contempt (Fischer & Roseman 2007; Melwane & Barsade 2011; Rozin et al. 1999). People who are treated with contempt are “looked down up” (which is fitting to their lower position in the social hierarchy and their failure to uphold the common good). As opposed to disgust psychology (which involves expulsion), contempt psychology involves *excluding* violators from group membership and its benefits. In American society, this has meant an exclusion of sexual minority people from rights of citizenship. Similarly, in a school setting where hegemonic masculinity is valued, sexual minority men may be excluded from male peer groups. Bullying, as I explain in Chapter 4, may be in part an effort to reinforce the “common good” of hegemonic masculinity within the school setting. Sexual minority men who are excluded for failing to uphold the “common good” in a given microsystem may face significant reductions in access to social capital.

### Autonomy Ethic

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<sup>229</sup> Those at the top of the social hierarchy determine what the “community good” is, and are thus able to meet its requirements most effectively.

Religious-based and community-based narratives (based in the divinity and community ethics) marginalize sexual minority people in Western society. The autonomy ethic, on the other hand, has been a key factor in the promotion of LGBT rights. (Haidt 2012) According to the autonomy ethic, people operate primarily as individuals rather than members of larger social groups. People should be free to satisfy their wants and needs apart from the consideration of others in their social group, as long as doing so does not harm others or impinge on their right to satisfy their own wants and needs (i.e. the *Liberty/Harm* principle).

The autonomy ethic holds that LGBT people should be free to form relationships and participate as equals in society. Moral psychologists note that the autonomy ethic is a relatively recent development in human history and is only predominant in Western, industrial societies (Pinker 2011). The autonomy ethic produces counternarratives to religious and community-based narratives about race and sexuality<sup>230</sup>. This has been the case with both the Civil Rights and LGBT rights movements. People who hold narratives supporting the individual rights of minority groups may react in anger when the rights of that group are violated (Haidt 2012; Rozin et al. 1999). If that person shares a close relationship to a member of the minority group, this may prompt them to action. Many people who advocate for sexual minority youth—whether it is their teachers, parents or religious leaders—may be motivated by the autonomy ethic.

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<sup>230</sup> Autonomy narrative operates as counter-narrative by circumventing these narratives—by viewing society as a disparate set of individuals (community)

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### Publications

MacIver, M. A., & Messel, M. (2013). The ABCs of keeping on track to graduation: Research findings from Baltimore. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 18(1), 50-67.

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